



# INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURS: COOPERATION OR CONFRONTATION?



Edited by Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik



# *India's Relations with Neighbours: Cooperation or Confrontation?*

Edited by  
Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik



India Study Centre  
Institute of Strategic Studies  
Islamabad



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*Dedicated to the Peace and Prosperity of South Asia*



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## Foreword

For over seventy years since its independence in 1947, India has remained entangled in conflictual relationship with most of its neighbours. From the illegal occupation, and later annexation, of Jammu and Kashmir and the economic blockades of Nepal, to border and water issues with Bangladesh and blatant interference in Sri Lanka, India has had difficulties in forming peaceful relationships with its neighbours in South Asia. Even with China, with which it has fought a war in 1962, conflict resurfaced in Ladakh region recently. India has also completely overwhelmed the sovereignty of Bhutan. Cumulatively, India seems to have developed a pattern of conflictual relations with all its neighbours.

A number of questions arise. Are India's aggressive designs an attempt to establish its hegemony in the region? Does India want to engage with its neighbours only on its own terms? Could India have chosen a different path, the path of cooperation rather than confrontation? This book seeks to find answers to these questions. Various chapters of the book explore whether India's relations with its neighbours are destined to remain confrontational or whether regional cooperation can become India's preferred choice to deal with its neighbours.

There is a disturbing trend shaping up in today's India. The growing wave of Hindu nationalism is making India head towards an uncertain future. Internally, the country is fast moving away from its avowed objectives of being a pluralistic and secular country. It is firmly on track to create an ideological state that would recognize only the right of Hindus to live in India. This emanates from the philosophy of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which provides the inspirational guidance for the BJP government of Prime Minister Modi. In many ways, the Hindutva philosophy of the RSS is a form of extreme xenophobia, that has little to no space for non-Hindu minorities. India could well face severe commotions and disturbances if it continues on the path of creating a Hindu Rashtra to the detriment of all its minorities.

The external prong of this approach is that the Indian government seems to be asserting its hegemony in the region and treat South Asia as its area of influence. The neighbours of India, especially



Pakistan, believe in sovereign equality and are not prepared to take dictation. This pitches India in a confrontational mode with its neighbours. Will India change its course? Perhaps it might. After all, the entire Asian continent has embarked upon the path of development through connectivity. China's BRI is connecting countries far and wide. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor, too, is opening up north-south connectivity, promising new vistas of cooperation. Should India move towards the path of cooperation, the entire neighbourhood could benefit from this shift in Indian approach. The critical question is whether India will choose the path of cooperation or whether it would remain convinced on asserting its hegemonic influence viz its neighbours.

The situation has further become complicated after the onset of major power competition between the United States and China. The US has chosen India as its preferred partner to contain the rise of China. The US tilt towards India has further emboldened the Modi regime to take a heavy-handed approach in the neighbourhood. For instance, instead of working with Pakistan to resolve the longstanding Kashmir dispute, it went ahead to annex the disputed territory, and is currently engaged in changing its demography. In the process, Kashmiris have been subjected to untold brutalities and human rights violations, which have attracted criticism from around the world.

A yet more dangerous trend that has lately become visible is Indian shifting doctrines towards preemptive strikes, like the one it carried out in February 2019. Pakistan responded by bringing down the intruding aircraft, but sent a strong signal of restraint and responsibility by releasing the captured pilot. To engage in such provocative conventional confrontation with a nuclear armed state is high risk politics. Likewise, India is confronting two nuclear armed states, China and Pakistan, in conventional skirmishes, which is highly irresponsible.

The need of the hour is for India to take positive and definitive steps to promote peace and cooperation in the region. The region of South Asia can become a bastion of peace if the biggest state of the region, India, chooses to engage its neighbours in a spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit. This region is suffering from poverty and under-development. India can take a lead in

channeling its cooperation with its neighbours in the direction of regional economic integration and peaceful coexistence. It would further help if India shows willingness and flexibility to resolve the unsettled disputes with its neighbours. The SAARC should also be allowed or enabled to play its role for the common good of the region. Only time will tell whether India chooses cooperation or confrontation in its relations with its neighbours.

The India Study Centre at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad has taken a lead in publishing an all-encompassing book on this important subject to understand the regional dynamics arising out of Indian behaviour viz its neighbours. The objective is to provide the readers with impartial and objective analyses so that they could draw their inferences. I hope the book will be of interest to the wider readership across the globe.

Let me commend the worthy authors at home and abroad for their scholarly work, and adding quality literature to the existing body of knowledge on this subject.

I would also like to recognize the hard work of team of the India Study Centre, led by Dr. Saif Malik.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry  
Director General  
Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad  
August, 2021

## Preface

**“Know thy enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated.”** This famous quote of great Chinese philosopher and strategist Sun Tzu has great relevance for Pakistan as well as other South Asian countries viz-à-viz their relations with India. Since its independence in 1947, India has adopted an aggressive policy towards all its neighbours. With Pakistan, India has fought three full scale wars, whereas, other smaller countries of the region have always been treated as India’s colonies.

Despite that, today’s India is very much different from what it used be just few years ago or what the founding fathers of Indian Republic wished it to be. Today, India is driven by Hindutva ideology which not only dismisses its own minorities as outsiders but also seek to realize the long-cherished dream of “Akhand Bharat.” While the dream of Akhand Bharat may remain a dream, but in the effort to realize it India has not only been openly challenging the sovereignty of all its neighbours but has also compromised the security and stability of the region.

Be it the economic blockade of Nepal, interference in the internal matters of Sri Lanka in garb of peacekeeping force or belligerence towards Pakistan, India has been acting as a bully in the region. On top of that, since 2014, with the rise of a right-wing government, India’s own internal policies have also been a source of great concern for regional countries. The treatment being meted out to minorities, particularly Muslims, the exercise of controversial and discriminatory National Register of Citizens in Assam and introduction of Citizenship Amendment Act, all have the potential to destabilize the region politically and economically. Worst, the plight of the people of illegally Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir is yet another story of Indian brutality towards people whose only crime is to demand their right to self-determination.

Hence, it is important for Pakistan as well as other smaller South Asian countries to understand the current trends in India’s internal policies as well as its policies towards its neighbourhood. It was indeed this need that led the Institute of Strategic Studies to focus on different facets of contemporary India.

The book exclusively focuses on the Hindutva philosophy and how it is affecting the Indian society as well as the region. Within India, this extremist ideology is manifesting itself in daylight lynchings, killings, and forceful conversion to Hinduism of the minorities. Whereas, beyond India, driven by expansionist designs, India is increasingly adopting a very hostile posture towards its neighbours. Be it Nepal, Sri Lanka or India's otherwise close ally Bangladesh, India is having troubles with all its neighbours. Needless to say, that with Pakistan, the relationship has seen a sharp decline since 2014 when Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power and this relationship further deteriorated following the suicide attack in Pulwama in February 2019 by an indigenous Kashmiri youth. Since Pakistan strongly suspects Indian intentions of carrying out false flag operations and put the blame on Pakistan for its own nefarious designs, the book also deeply looks into this possibility and how Pakistan can respond to any such Indian misadventure in future.

Any discussion on the peace and security of the region will be incomplete if the issue of Kashmir is not pondered upon. Termed as the nuclear flash point in South Asia and the reason behind two full scale wars, the Kashmir issue is the main bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The book, therefore, devotes a chapter on Illegally Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) focusing primarily on the aftermath of August 5, 2019 particularly, the gross human rights violations of the Kashmiri people.

Beyond the South Asian countries, this book also deals with the factors that pushed the Chinese forces to secure the Ladakh region in response to the Indian aggression and hegemonic designs. The paper concludes that although this is not a routine face to face conflict, it will however, not gear up to full-scale war.

A chapter in the book is also dedicated to trace the evolution of the concept of Indo-Pacific and assesses its impact for the region of South Asia. Since, the Indo-Pacific concept contains very few new ideas on how to deal with the rise of China, this chapter maintains that the term itself does not present a revised regional order. Analysing the strategic implications of Indo-Pacific for South Asia, this chapter further explains that this concept could be seen as a harbinger of security dilemma for the region.

With its vast canvas of issues of peace and security of the region, it is hoped that the book will provide necessary insights to the policy makers of not only in Pakistan but also other smaller South Asian countries to formulize an appropriate response to the growing belligerence of India.

Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik  
Director  
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Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad  
August, 2021

## Chapter No. 1

# India Sitting on Fence: In or Out

Prof. Dr. S. Gulden Ayman\*

### Abstract

This chapter addresses the dilemma faced by India whether to leave or continue to engage in Afghanistan. It adapts a realist-constructivist approach linking the independent variables of power and identity together in explaining strategic behaviour of India. It highlights the tension between Indian identity transformation and limits of power in Afghanistan. The chapter begins with underlining the basic premises of neo-realist approach with a special attention given to dilemmas of alliance politics. It asserts that the Indian policy vis-a-vis Afghanistan rests upon forming loose alliances with great powers that not only bring fears of “entrapment” and “abandonment” but “fear of losing its strategic autonomy” as well. It identifies priorities of the Indian diplomacy and seeks to make an evaluation of India’s role in Afghanistan after the Soviet and American interventions in the context of challenges faced and solutions utilized. The second part of the study stresses the need to examine state identities of India and Afghanistan and the difficulty in reaching harmony between internal and external dimensions of Indian identity under NDA (National Democratic Alliance) regime in order to better understand the dilemmas in Indian foreign policy that would become more visible after the US’ withdrawal. The main arguments of the chapter are as follows: India’s policy towards Afghanistan has largely been shaped by its hostility towards Pakistan. It is also true that much of India’s developmental and diplomatic footprint in Afghanistan for the last two decades became possible only due to American military presence in the country. Moreover, currently Modi government is in the process of forging a new grand narrative

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of identity that sows the seeds of conflict through demonization of Muslims in India as well as in South Asia region. India has to choose either to continue its hostility towards Pakistan and the Muslims or focus on its rise as a regional power that promotes peaceful relations and cooperation in the region.

**Keywords:** India-Afghanistan relations, US-India relations, Alliance Politics, Loose Alliances, Kashmir Problem, Realist-Constructivist Approach.

### **India-Afghanistan relations from a Realist-Structural perspective**

A realistic analysis of India's relations with Afghanistan requires that the power capabilities of the two countries and the threats they perceive should be evaluated together with the characteristics of the international system. However, an approach that does not take into account the identity dimension will not reflect changing character of the relations between the two countries in a comprehensive way.<sup>1</sup>

### **Basic Assumptions of the Neo-Realist Approach**

The Neo-Realist Approach suggests that states use two fundamental means to survive and ensure their security in an anarchic or unruly environment. The first of these is internal balancing, that is, efforts to increase economic capacity, military power, and develop more effective strategies. The second one; external balancing, refers to resorting to alliances and diplomacy. Such efforts may include alliances with other states, strengthening existing ones, or activities to weaken or eliminate the opposing alliance. The neo-realist approach argues that it is the capacity of a state that determines which mechanism it will rely on while protecting its interests. In this context, it is argued that the great powers are more likely to use their power elements primarily whereas the smaller ones to form alliances.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Samuel Barkin, "Realist Constructivism," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 3 (September 2003): 325-342.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University Press, 1987), 163, 168.

## Intra-Alliance Political Dynamics

According to Walt intra-alliance dynamics can be explored under four headings: the distribution of burdens within an alliance, alliance cohesion and leadership, twin dangers of abandonment and entrapment and the impact of norms and institutions.<sup>3</sup> The strength of alliances increases at the rate of unity and harmony among allies. It seems that two kinds of concerns may arise within the Alliance. One of them is the concern that a state will be dragged into unwanted conflicts by the leader of the alliance or by other allies (entrapment), the other is the state of being left alone and not supported by other allies in case of a threat to itself (abandonment). These two concerns can be resolved simultaneously only if the enemy is clear, the threat is big and common. Studies concentrated on European security during the Cold War maintained that such a situation can only occur in a bipolar system. Otherwise, there is risk of being dragged after the ally, while trying to create stronger ties in order to eliminate an anxiety of being left alone.<sup>4</sup>

## Dyadic, Asymmetrical Alliances

International alignments that India has tried to establish with great powers so far differ from the military alliances mentioned in the neo-realist literature in certain ways. First of all, they include dyadic and asymmetrical bilateral engagements that are different from multilateral security groupings.

It would not be very meaningful to measure distribution of burdens, alliance cohesion and leadership in India's relations with great powers since they do not acquire a clear common enemy that urges them to get united and act together either to deter or destroy an adversary. In fact, these formations are different from NATO and similar formations, which include a promise that the allies are obliged to assist in the event of a military threat to one of the parties. They include bargains in terms of political and economic interests and military ties are often established along their axis. Besides, there are no established norms and institutions that guide

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen. M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics* 61, no.1 (2009): 86-120, 89-91.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no.4 (July 1984): 461-495.



partners' external behaviour other than some similarities acquired that are often pronounced in order to strengthen mutual understanding for common goals. Since how they will develop in the future cannot be easily predicted in literature the terms that are used to refer to such formations include "semi-alliance" (quasi-alliance)<sup>5</sup>, "loose alliance"<sup>6</sup>, or "liquid alliance."<sup>7</sup>

Although the problems within such alignments do not make themselves felt as strongly as in military alliances, they can also manifest themselves in these formations. As the dependence of a regional actor to the great power increases, the possibility of being dragged into conflicts with it also augments. The cause of this dependence may be the threat it perceives from another great power as well as the fear of losing domestic support and consequently search for external sources of empowerment. On the other hand, differences in interests, threat perceptions and vision with the great power can also trigger regional actor's fear of abandonment. Conversely, when the regional actor does not perceive any threat from any other great power, the less dependent it becomes and feels much less risk of being dragged into problems and conflicts that it does not want to involve. In addition, great powers dominance in the region where regional actor is active is not wanted and found irritating by the regional actor hence there is more likelihood to see great power-regional actor collaborating when a great power dominance is not sought. Lastly, systematically speaking there is more room for a regional actor to enter into different kinds of alignments with the great powers as long as the struggle between the great powers does not escalate.

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<sup>5</sup> Degang Sun, "Brothers Indeed: Syria-Iran Quasi-Alliance Revisited," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2009): 67-80.

<sup>6</sup> S. Gulden Ayman, *Neo-Realist bir Perspektiften Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Yunan Dış Politikası: Güç, Tehdit ve İttifaklar (Neo-Realist Approach to Greek Foreign Policy in post-Cold War Period: Power, Threat and Alignments)* Ankara: SAEMK, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Eduard Soler I Lecha, *Liquid Alliances in the Middle East* (Barcelona: Barcelona Center for International Affairs 2017), [https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication\\_series/notes\\_internacionals/n1\\_169/liquid\\_alliances\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_eas](https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/notes_internacionals/n1_169/liquid_alliances_in_the_middle_eas)

## Power, Threat and Alliances

As opposed to India's relations with great powers a power comparison between India and Afghanistan will reveal the superiority of India's relative power. Moreover, the territorial problems which are considered to be the most important issues causing crises and wars in international relations do not exist between India and Afghanistan. What makes Afghanistan important for India is the intense enmity between India and Pakistan. Behind this adversarial relationship lies the unsolved and increasingly complex Kashmir problem. So far India and Pakistan have experienced three major wars (1947, 1965, and 1971) and one limited conflict (1999). While India's role in the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan has further increased Pakistan's threat perception, India not only continued its violation of the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions that urged a free and impartial plebiscite for the determination of the future of the state by the people of Jammu and Kashmir it also revoked the special constitutional status of Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 downgrading them into a union territory in 2019.

India's Afghanistan policy is aimed at isolating and encircling Pakistan. Strategic ties with Afghanistan give India the opportunity both to weaken Pakistan and disrupt Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan. Relations with Afghanistan also offer India a gateway to the Central Asian countries rich in natural gas, provides an opportunity to increase its influence regionally satisfying New Delhi's need to prove itself as a rising power.

Undoubtedly, it is not only India's perceptions of threats and interests that determine to what extent India-Afghanistan relations can be developed. Afghanistan's threat perceptions and needs are also effective in the course of their relations. In this vein, one of the most important drivers that brought India and Afghanistan close to each other is the Durand Line problem.<sup>8</sup> The line which was drawn by the British in 1893 turned into a problem between Pakistan and

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<sup>8</sup> Vinay Kaura, "The Durand Line: A British Legacy," *Middle East Institute*, June 27, 2017, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/durand-line-british-legacy-plaguing-afghan-pakistani-relations>

Afghanistan after the disintegration of India. Due to this problem Afghanistan did not recognize the independence of Pakistan in the UN in 1947. Afghan King Zahir Shah's desire to annex Peshawar, which was once used as the summer residence of the Afghan Empire, was the main motive of India to consider Afghanistan as an ally against Pakistan. A bilateral friendship agreement signed in 1950 is the result of such an environment. The growth of this problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan went as far as in 1961, when the borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan were closed and the two countries severed diplomatic relations with each other.

### **Systemic Effects, Nature of Alliances, and Indian Foreign Policy**

India's foreign policy was influenced by the bipolar character of the international system during the Cold War as well as by the US' claim to be the hegemonic power in the absence of the Soviet Union. When the effects of systemic changes are evaluated together with the power capabilities and threat perceptions of India, the example of India reveals that a regional actor cannot easily preserve a balance between great powers when it is under the pressure of one of them. Furthermore, partnership with great powers often brings complicated problems as well as strengthening the position of the regional actor.

### **India's Relations with the Great Powers and Its Afghanistan Policy**

The Cold War posed a major obstacle for India, which was in the process of building its nation-state and was experiencing serious economic difficulties. Jawaharlal Nehru refused to polarization, and argued that the involvement of super powers should be minimized within the framework of non-alignment, no commitment should be made to the US and the Soviet Union, and by establishing a distant relationship with both superpowers India should seek assistance from both sides.

However, after the border war with China in 1962, this approach was gradually abandoned. India, once a non-socialist country that recognized the Chinese Communist Party government obliged to start closer relations with the US to balance China. As a result, the US became the most important country that helped India until the end of the 1960s. But, after the US' rapprochement with

Pakistan and Pakistan's first joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and then consolidating its partnership with the US through the Baghdad Pact in 1954 India turned to the USSR to balance Pakistan and counter the military prowess of the People's Republic of China. After the Soviet Union-India Friendship and Cooperation Treaty signed in 1971, India gradually moved away from the non-alignment policy.

For the Soviet Union, in addition to the prospect of eroding the Western interests and limiting Chinese influence in Asia, close ties with India has also presented a window of opportunity to prove itself as an Asian and global power. Besides Pakistan's alliance with the US the participation of Turkey, Iran and Iraq in the Baghdad Pact pushed the Soviet Union to seek a balance. Moreover, the reversed attitude of Soviet Union towards India could also be explained with the emergent probability of US-China-Pakistan coalition after the Nixon-Kissinger breakthrough to China in 1971. Indo-Soviet treaty signed in August 1971 was a clear indication of this.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, due to the ties established with India, the Soviets were also getting into contact with third world countries and non-aligned countries.<sup>10</sup>

The most concrete indicator of Soviet diplomatic support to India was realized at the United Nations on Kashmir, Goa, and Bangladesh issues. The support given by the Soviet Union during the escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan due to the mass protests in Kashmir in 1990 increased the importance of these relations. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in his meeting with Foreign Minister Shilendra Kumar Singh in Moscow affirmed Kashmir as an integral part of India and stressed the Soviets' support for India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In return to Soviet support India behaved respectably to the needs and security concerns of the Soviet Union. However, in spite of the closer relations between Moscow and New Delhi there were some obvious differences. India was in search of a peace zone that

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<sup>9</sup> Rajan Menon "India and the Soviet Union: A New Stage of Relations?," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 7 (July 1978): 731-750, 733-734.

<sup>10</sup> VY. Belokrenitsky, "Soviet-Indian Relations: History and Perspectives" in Hafeez Malik ed., *Dilemmas of National Security and Cooperation in India and Pakistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 54-61.

would eliminate the superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean, and it was not supportive of Soviet Invasions of Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Moreover, India was not only aiming at decreasing the role of Soviets but also the role of China, the US or the UN in its relations with Pakistan and other South Asian countries.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, after recognizing the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1978, India contributed to a number of ambitious development projects in Afghanistan during the 1980s thanks to its proximity with the Soviets. The demand-driven strategy particularly helped India to generate a significant amount of goodwill for itself, while providing needed assistance to Afghanistan in key sectors such as education, health, irrigation, electricity generation, transport, rural development and critical infrastructure construction.

Yet the presence of India in Afghanistan was not irreversible. It was shaken by the steps towards the organization and strengthening of the Afghan mujahedeen, which were put into practice in Afghanistan in the context of anti-Soviet policies during the period of US President Jimmy Carter. Moreover, the critical role played by Pakistan in US' support to mujahedeen increased Pakistan's importance at the expense of India.

### India-US Relations

At the onset India's policy of non-alignment which was a product of the rejection of a binary worldview and rested on narratives of India's moral exceptionalism irritated India-US relations. According to the critical perspective Nehru took, modern structures of capitalism and nationalism had given rise to colonialism and imperialism and "Western" modernity tends toward exploitation, violence, and material betterment at the expense of the community's moral and cultural values.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ramesh Thakur, "India and the Soviet Union: Conjunctions and Disjunctions of Interests," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 9 (September 1991): 826-846.

<sup>12</sup> Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11.

In the post-Soviet era India's economic reforms led to the perception of India's endorsement of US-style free market capitalism. On the other hand, the US' decline in economic and political dominance and the emergence of a unipolar multi-centric environment have also produced a shift in the positioning of India in American strategy. The discourse on the "rise of India" that emerged in the mid-2000s was an attempt on the part of US policymakers to invest in constructing a new "special relationship" with India. As Priya Chacko argues while the potency of non-alignment's challenge to the US moral order has been diminished, India's "moral neutralism" replaced with claims of India's responsibility and innate peacefulness, which endorses India's sense of civilizational exceptionalism as a genuine source for respect for diversity and democracy.<sup>13</sup>

US' dramatic concession to India in the form of US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement of 2008 marked a turning point in US-India relations. According to the terms of the agreement, US lifted a number of sanctions that it had imposed on India as a consequence of its tests in 1998. Furthermore India and the US defined terrorism as a "common peril" after 9/11 and in the mid-2000s, the idea of India as a counter to a rising China was promoted.<sup>14</sup> India rapidly became a major importer of US military equipment and started to adopt tougher stances toward Pakistan and China.

### **Indian Assistance in Afghanistan since 2001**

Since 2001, India has relied upon development projects and other forms of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. India's activities range from infrastructure investments to education supports India that offers scholarships to university students also played a key role in building the new Afghan parliament. The main difference of

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<sup>13</sup> Prime Minister Singh addressed a Joint Session of Congress July 19, 2005 with the following words: "As democracies, we must work together to create a world in which democracies can flourish." See, M. Karen Walker, "Narratives of Engagement in US-India Relations: A Look Back at the US-India 123 Agreement Debate," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 11 (2016): 49-77; Teresita C. Schaffer, *India and the United States in the 21st Century: Reinventing Partnership* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Priya Chacko, "A New 'Special Relationship'?: Power Transitions, Ontological Security, and India-US Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* (2013): 1-18.

India's activity in Afghanistan after 2001 from the past years is that India has also started to provide military training.

Most recently, in February 2021, Afghanistan received 500,000 doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine from India. Ghani and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed an agreement for the construction of the Shahtoot Dam near Kabul, during a virtual summit that same month. The dam is expected to provide safe drinking water, irrigation water and electricity to the nearby areas.

While India's development cooperation in Afghanistan became a reality because of US presence, it has also helped the development New Delhi's strategic partnership with Washington, which appreciates India's work in the country.

### **Supporting Separatists through Afghanistan**

India's alliance with Afghanistan is expanding the anti-Pakistan front. An important reason for this is that India uses its Afghan lands to support separatist groups in Pakistan and wages a proxy war against Pakistan over Afghanistan.

Pashtun nationalism adopted by the Daoud regime in the 1970s made Afghanistan the most important country to be used against Pakistan. An important aspect of this convergence is the close ties developed between the RAW and the Afghan intelligence agency KHAD.

India not only supports the Pashtun separatists; it also uses the Baluchistan problem. In its low-intensity proxy war against Pakistan, Indian intelligence is actually trying to move two opposing ethnic nationalist separatist groups together to support each other. Pakistan alleges that the states of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, FATA and Baluchistan are provoked by India.<sup>15</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reference to the Baloch freedom struggle in his Independence Day speech, saying "the people in the conflicted Pakistani state of Baluchistan, as also in Gilgit and

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<sup>15</sup> Masud Ahmad Khan, "Indian interference in Balochistan," *The Nation*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2021/indian-interference-in-balochistan>

Pakistan-occupied Kashmir had reached out to him” regarded by Pakistani authorities a confirmation of India’s role there.<sup>16</sup>

### India’s Challenges and Choices

The fragmented structure of Afghanistan and the struggles of various factions within this structure have always been a factor that complicates New Delhi’s policy making. It is not possible for India to maintain friendly relations with all groups, as it approached Afghanistan to establish an anti-Pakistan front. Since it will not be possible to eliminate pro-Pakistani groups altogether, it is unthinkable that India will attract all of them to its side before the improvement of its relations with Pakistan. In other words, one of the preconditions for establishing permanent constructive relations with all groups is to resolve or at least restrain the conflict with Pakistan.

In addition to that as it was seen in the Najibullah period even when Afghanistan is under the control of a power that has close relations with India, zero-sum struggles continue between those who even share the same ideology. High level of fragmentation and polarization impede the possibility to pursue a neutral approach. A problem similar to India’s inability of to develop impartial relations simultaneously with the Khalq and Parcham *factions* of the People’s Democratic Party of *Afghanistan* (PDPA) because of their enmity, again manifested itself in the 2000s in India’s relations with other Pashtun groups during the presidency of Karzai.

It would be a nightmare for Indian geopolitical interests in the region if Pakistan’s influence increases drastically with the Taliban’s return to power. If a Pakistan-backed group comes to power in Afghanistan, India’s influence in this country would depend solely on the emergence of a group or groups opposing Pakistan. After the fall of the pro-Soviet Afghan regime in 1989, India provided support the Northern Alliance against Taliban under the command of Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Massoud who was also given aid by Iran and Russia. When the forces under the command of Massoud were sieged in the late 1990s, India even built a hospital in

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<sup>16</sup> “In policy shift, Narendra Modi brings up Balochistan again,” *The Hindu*, August 16, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/In-policy-shift-Narendra-Modi-brings-up-Balochistan-again/article14572650.ece>



Tajikistan to treat Tajik soldiers at India's air base in 2001. One of the most striking steps taken by India in its search to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan has been the construction of roads connecting Afghanistan to Iran aimed at enabling Afghanistan's trade to reach the Persian Gulf from the port of Chabahar and eliminate its need to use the port of Karachi.

Avinash Paliwal argues that the foreign policy elite of India is divided into two distinct groups regarding with whom India would rely on and contact in Afghanistan. The first group adopts a non-military, mostly economically and politically neutral approach, while the other advocates a militarily sound, economically aggressive and politically partisan attitude. The first group, also called 'conciliators', recommends that India focus on those who came to power in Kabul but meanwhile it should not disrupt its relations with all other groups, including pro-Pakistani groups, and should emphasize having a positive image in the eyes of the public. According to the second group, called the 'partisans', establishing and/or maintaining relations with pro-Pakistani groups is not a feasible goal. For this reason, India should focus on developing good relations with anti-Pakistani groups. Partisans advocate for increasing the financial resources of anti-Pakistani groups and India to seek international support to these groups. Paliwal suggests that the existence of different groups, bureaucracy, diplomacy and politics provide flexibility to New Delhi's approach to Afghanistan, and the changing features of the domestic political environment in Afghanistan will determine which group takes the lead. For example, India was able to adopt a conciliatory approach to the mujahedeen government in Kabul in the early 1990s, but when the Taliban came to power in 1996, partisans began to be influential in India's Afghanistan policy.<sup>17</sup>

### **Establishing Relationship with the Taliban**

In the 1990s and 2000s, New Delhi was firmly against any agreement with the Taliban, or any recognition of it. However, a

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<sup>17</sup>Avinash Paliwal, "A cautious balance - explaining India's approach toward Afghanistan's peace process," *Asian Security* (2019): 263-280; Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13, 619.

strategic partnership agreement was signed between the Afghan government and India in October 2011 that paved the way towards opening negotiations with the Taliban.

India frequently expresses that it favours a solution drawn and embraced by Afghans in Afghanistan. While it continues to support the democratically elected government's reconciliation efforts, it is no longer reluctant to engage in more important issues with the militant group. Participating in talks with the Taliban as an observer, India seems to be following the efforts to create a common framework by making economic promises. In November 2018, when Russia met with the Taliban, members of the Afghan Supreme Peace Council and other regional powers, India chose to send an informal delegation of two diplomats to Moscow. In September 2020, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar attended the opening session of the intra-Afghan talks in Doha. India's witnessing the processes in Doha and Kabul through its ambassadors could also be considered as a signal that he accepted the US-Taliban and US-Afghanistan peace agreements.<sup>18</sup> Many recommend India to pursue a 'wait and watch' approach at this point in time and not to be pessimistic believing that a lot has changed in Afghanistan's political landscape since 2001. They *think that it would be wise for India to observe how things unfold after the US-Taliban peace agreement, and then chalk-out a new strategy at an appropriate time.*<sup>19</sup> It is often argued that after the US withdrawal if Taliban do not respond positively to Indian overtures, India can again alternatively increase its support to non-Pashtun groups, which are fiercely opposed to Taliban. India has its old friends – the Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks – in the north of Afghanistan. Still many in New Delhi fear that the Taliban's return to power may

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<sup>18</sup> Sheikh Saaliq, "AP Interview: Top Afghan negotiator lauds India's support," *AP News*, 10 October 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-peace-process-afghanistan-india-kabul-7df3959333408dbceff8d9fdfa2a5b21>; Harsh V. Pant, and Kriti M. Shah, "India Joins the Afghan Peace Negotiations," March 25 2021, *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/25/india-afghanistan-peace-talks-pakistan-russia-china-biden/>

<sup>19</sup> Manish Rai, "U.S.-Taliban Deal: India should Chalk-out a New Strategy," *Open Column Magazine*, 21 March 2020, <https://opedcolumn.news.blog/2020/03/21/us-taliban-deal-india-should-chalk-out-a-new-strategy/>

jeopardize India's \$3 billion worth of investments and strategic interests. In the first annual budget of his second tenure presented in parliament in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi allocated 4 billion rupees (\$58 million) for development work in Afghanistan. But anticipating a setback in case of a hostile government taking over Kabul, it slashed allocations for the construction of Iran's Chabahar port to a mere 450 million rupees (\$6.5 million) from 1.5 billion rupees (\$21.8 million) for the year 2019-20.<sup>20</sup>

It is true that economic investments and aid produce influence. But in order for that to happen peace and stability should prevail in Afghanistan and if that is the issue, the essential question to be raised is that how New Delhi could contribute to Afghans to build peace.

### **The Dilemmas of Fostering Close Ties with the Great Powers over Afghanistan**

Though India's influence over Afghanistan during both the Soviet era and the post-Taliban period was due to its close relationship with the external actor, it does not mean that all obstacles to the establishment and continuation of its influence over this country disappeared in both periods.

The literature on alliances does not provide us with a comprehensive framework on the strategic relations established with loose coalitions in particular on the problems of a coalition between a great power and a regional actor since the existing research was developed on military alliances and mainly on the political differences between NATO allies. The great powers do not ask or even inform about the steps they will take. As a matter of fact, in 1979, Moscow's decision to invade Afghanistan took place without consulting India, and this development almost shocked New Delhi. Establishing close ties with great power also puts pressure on the regional actor not to question its political decisions. While India could not directly criticize the Soviet Union due to its support on Kashmir and the flow of the defence equipment and oil not to be interrupted, it was deeply concerned that the Soviets

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<sup>20</sup> *İftikhar Gilani*, "Anxiety in India over Afghan peace process," *Anadolu Agency*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/anxiety-in-india-over-afghan-peace-process/1536789>

would advance in South Asia and the turn might come to India as well. Soviets being a regional power, unlike the USA made New Delhi to think that it might want to control India after Afghanistan. This type of anxiety expresses a problem very different from the fear of abandonment or entrapment, a concern that a threat may come directly from the partner. Today seeing USA gradually presuming a de facto leadership role and a position of dominance their relationship would also upset New Delhi.

Another challenge in such a relationship is the fear of entrapment. What the great powers are demanding or able to demand from India are actually moves that pose serious risks to New Delhi. In this vein, after 2003, the USA's desire to determine the nature of India's presence in Afghanistan and its push for India's military presence in the country that generated unease of getting involved in Afghan domestic politics and drift into conflicts in New Delhi.

The Indian solution to escape pressures coming from the great power or its neighbour Afghanistan for deeper involvement in the affairs of Afghanistan has been to limit its relations with this country to commercial and economic relations. A clear example of this was India's polite rejection of the Prime Minister of Afghanistan Sardar Mohammad Daoud's proposal to squeeze Pakistan militarily from both sides in 1975. Instead of it economic aid offered to Afghanistan by Indira Gandhi, who visited Kabul in 1976.

In spite of the fact that India's relationship with the US makes it feel much stronger and satisfies its desire to prove itself as a rising power India is concerned about what will happen after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan today. After White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki's announcement that the US will start to withdraw its remaining troops before May, and planning to remove all US troops before the 20th anniversary of September 11, US President Joe Biden also declared that "It came to end America's longest war the time came to call American troops to return home." As the withdrawal of the Soviets showed competition and conflict increased within Afghanistan, in the region and between global powers.

In the 'Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan' signed between US and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, on 29 February 2020 the Taliban guaranteed "enforcement mechanisms to prevent the use of Afghan land by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies. However, it remained unclear whether India, which is not a US ally, was included in this definition, and if so, what would that mean? In the last part of the agreement, it is stated that the US and the Taliban are "seeking positive relations with each other." New Delhi fears that "intra-Afghan" dialogue and India's support for the electoral process for leadership in Afghanistan will be put aside. According to the New Delhi's interpretation the developments as the Ghani government, which India recognizes as the winner of the 2019 elections, will only serve for a temporary period. Furthermore, there is a question mark whether Afghanistan will remain a democracy.

In other words, the problem that New Delhi has to deal with is not the usual one; which of the conflicting groups India should support and should stand against. Peace depends on whether the different groups in Afghanistan unite under a common umbrella and whether this common framework gains sustainability. If a peaceful environment fails to be created or if it lasts for a while and then collapses not only Afghanistan but also India would face the negative impacts of the spread of instability.

### **The Limits of India's Partnership with the USA and China Factor**

India's perceptions national interests do not always match with US' global concerns in areas like Iran, Afghanistan or Pakistan. American Af-Pak policies and the consequent American need to retain close security ties with Pakistan and the Indian concern about American military aid to Pakistan are clear diverging viewpoints between India and the US. India regards Iran an important source of oil and a link to Afghanistan; hence it is interested in the development of the Chabahar port region and the link between Chabahar and Afghanistan through Zaranj and Delaram, which is

located on the main Kandahar-Herat highway on the Afghanistan border.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from that India not only has a major defence relationship and strategic partnership with Russia that makes managing relations with Washington difficult, it also seeks to engage China on questions of regional order while also standing firm in the event of a security crisis involving Beijing.

Indo-Pacific re-emerged as a viable strategic concept in 2017 and India is one of the major powers that formed quadrilateral security dialogue (the Quad) besides the US, Japan and Australia India. As Rohan Mukherjee explains India advocates an inclusive approach to the Indo-Pacific carefully refraining from alienating China. China which poses a dynamic challenge to India in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is still India's largest trading partner. Contrary to Western powers' perception of India as a bulwark against Chinese expansionism India is keen on preserving maximum options for its own internal development pursuing strategic autonomy.<sup>22</sup>

If the main purpose of the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan is to focus more on the threat posed by China, India might also find itself getting dragged into a struggle with China in a level which it does not intend to do.

The visible power competition between the U.S. and China and the U.S. commitment to the pivot of its policy towards Asia compels India to redefine its security role within their bilateral relations with the U.S. Though Chinese threat was the main motive that accelerated India-US relations in the past today many Indians oppose unconditional support given to US in its competition against China. As Stephen Walt argues, the Asian states who are

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<sup>21</sup> Shrikant Paranjpe, "United States in India's Changed Strategic Perspective in the Post-Cold War Era," *India Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (March 2013): 1-12, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Rohan Mukherjee, "Looking West, Acting East," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2019): 43-52, 43-47.

theoretically worried about China's rise don't seem willing to very much to balance against it.<sup>23</sup>

One peculiar feature of India's political culture is its insistence on "strategic autonomy" that comes from the historical experience of the country. This characteristic has roots in India's history of nonalignment, evidenced by persistent fear of any loss of its sovereign status and its legacy as a postcolonial state. The hegemony of foreigners that lasted nearly for two centuries has deeply shaken India's trust in the West. India's traumatic experience with imperialism has significantly shaped the worldview it has defended since independence and even today the distrust towards the West in the national psyche has not completely disappeared.

The weakness of Japan's military and its inability to offer sufficient deterrence against China increases the value of India's strategic partnership for US interests. The United States insists India to play a greater role in regional security and to act as a regional power to counter China. However, India worries that US may expose its allies to China's rising power, especially after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. According to the proponents of this view, in the event of a conflict with China the United States is likely to stand on the side-lines and not come to India's assistance. Therefore, closer US-India strategic ties are believed to bring important disadvantages to India. As a result, India is not ready to engage in a gunboat diplomacy and projecting hard power abroad to act assertively as a "counter" to China. In the same vein, India resisted intense pressure from the Bush administration in 2003 to send troops to Iraq, even in a non-combat role.<sup>24</sup>

Although Indian defence experts see China as the "number one potential threat", there are those who consider developing the India-China Pact on the border between the two countries more important than advancing relations with the United States. This

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "What Has Asia Done for Uncle Sam Lately?," *Foreign Policy*, May 16, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/16/what-has-asia-done-for-uncle-sam-lately/>

<sup>24</sup> Sumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason, *An Unnatural Partnership?: The Future of US-India Strategic Cooperation* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2019), 20-34.

cautious attitude towards China has also been instrumental in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message to Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang underlying to need to adopt global response to COVID, described the two countries as "two ancient civilizations with a long history of mutual benefit for centuries" voicing his desire to further the development partnership.<sup>25</sup> One could find the traces of this approach in India's attitude regarding debate on armed interventions in Libya, Syria and Iran.

### Identity-Foreign Policy Relationship

What a state can and cannot do in its foreign policy is not only determined by its position in the relative power distribution and its perceptions of threat. Any approach that disregards identity will be insufficient to explain the dynamics of foreign policy, as there is a multifaceted interaction between identity and foreign policy. While systemic dynamics and elements of identity could support each other, they could also operate contrary to each other as well.

The multifaceted relationship between identity and foreign policy has been the subject of many studies. However, focusing on different dimensions of identity makes it difficult to evaluate these studies under a single heading. One way to overcome this problem could be to address the internal and external dimensions of state identity in the framework of their multi-directional relations.

When we take its internal dimension, identity can be defined as a nation's unique way of thinking and life, language, customs and traditions, social values, judgments and rules. While the things that generate the feeling of "we" could be the things that a nation proud of being owned and achieved, being unjustly treated, oppressed, victimized in the past can also feed it. Vamik Volkan adopting E. Humburger Erikson's<sup>26</sup> definition of individual identity to large group identity argues that identity in international relations can be interpreted through "chosen victories" and "chosen traumas".

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<sup>25</sup> "Need to Adopt Global Response To COVID-19: PM Modi Tells Chinese Premier", *NDTV*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/coronavirus-outbreak-prime-minister-narendra-modi-tells-chinese-premier-li-keqiang-need-to-adopt-glo-2204548>

<sup>26</sup> Erik Humburger Erikson, "The Problem of Ego Identity," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4, no. 1 (1956): 56-121.



Chosen victories are the mental design of a sense of well-deserved (real or fantasy) success and victory over another group that brings together large group members. Chosen traumas on the other hand represent the shared mental representation of the feelings of humiliation, shame, sacrifice, and helplessness inflicted on a large group by "others" and historical events that force people to bear the loss of land, prestige and dignity.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, it is not possible to claim that the victories and traumas experienced in the past were transferred from generation to generation through common memory without any intervention. Internal political factors are effective on which identity elements will dominate. Identity is not an unchangeable phenomenon; it is defined as a result of competition between the ruling elite. It is constantly questioned, it becomes institutionalized to the extent that consensus reached among elite, and under some conditions it erodes and begins to change. It should also be noted that national identity gains continuity to the extent it becomes institutionalized in the sense of the creation of institutions for the imposition of certain understanding of identity from the childhood period onwards.

Undoubtedly, what is heard and learned at home, at school and from the press and media plays an important role in conveying who a nation is to young generations. Education is a central tool in national identity formation fostered through states. Governments in fact have the ability to control and impose curricula in schools and in order to define the identity discourse of the day.<sup>28</sup> While history education continues to be one of the most important tools of this socialization process, today television series and epic dramas also appear as influencers of society's identity perception.

External dimension of identity involves perceptions of shared beliefs and values with other nations. In a similar manner as we have observed in the internal dimension, again it is not possible to claim neither that elements related to the external dimension of

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<sup>27</sup> Vamik D. Volkan, "Large-Group Identity, International Relations and Psychoanalysis", *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 18, no.4 (2009): 206-213.

<sup>28</sup> Katharine Adeney, and MarieLall, "Institutional Attempts to build a 'National' Identity in India: internal and external dimensions," *India Review* 4, no.3 (2005).

identity are embraced by all layers of society nor they would not alter.

Furthermore, agreements and international institutions based on common goals and interests provide continuity and stability to the external dimension of state identity. These institutions can be military alliances such as NATO against a common enemy that express common concerns about security, as well as organizations such as the European Union that produces economic, social and political norms to be complied with in mutual relations and security policies.<sup>29</sup>

However not all statements and partnership agreements are necessarily empowered with a common perception of identity. In other words, the existence of common values is not an indispensable condition for the establishment of strategic ties, as observed in the relationship between the USA and Saudi Arabia.

While the internal and external dimensions of identity may be overlapping quality, they may also contain relatively different definitions and different understandings. Tensions between the internal and the external dimension may inevitably cause certain difficulties in foreign policymaking. After all, externally speaking, identity is about the answer given at the state level to the question of who are the allies and enemies, and to what types of values and norms relied in the relations with others.

## Identity of India

As Jutta Weldes argues, state identities partly develop prior to interstate interaction within domestic political and cultural contexts.<sup>30</sup> At independence the challenge for the new leaders of India was to redefine India's "identity" in line with the goal of creating a modern state. Indian "nation" is controversial because India's population is extremely diverse along religious, linguistic,

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<sup>29</sup> See: Peter S.Katzenstein ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

regional and caste lines. A territorial conception of citizenship rather than an ethnic one was adopted by Nehru who portrayed Indian history as all-inclusive and accommodating. According to Nehru those "who professed a religion of non-Indian origin or, coming to India, settled down there, became distinctively *Indian* in the course of a few generations."<sup>31</sup> Though Nehruvian inclusiveness had institutional limits, it was intended to promote tolerance.<sup>32</sup>

Secularism and democratic values are considered to be the strongest element of the internal dimension of India's state identity. It is related to the claim that India can create a nation by keeping people from different religions, sects, languages and racial groups together under the same roof. Hence the world is expected to commemorate and respect India because of its multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual, inclusive and open society. Although the predominant position of the Hindu majority in the state undermines this claim, it is supposed that India's capacity to create itself with differences is a rare value stemming from its civilization that empowers India to lead the international community. Initially created by Nehru, the secular, pluralist identity imagination denies the use of violence and in harmony with non-alignment and the Five Principles of Living Together with Peace.<sup>33</sup>

Though India draw the attention of international society with its support to the UN on many issues such as the elimination of colonial administrations and the prohibition of racism, its gradual abandonment of the idea of finding a solution through referendum in Kashmir, which it initially accepted, has shaken the positive image created. The most important factor that disrupts the harmony between the principles and its actual foreign policy has been India's relations with Pakistan. The unanimous acceptance of Kashmir as an internal problem of India and an inseparable part of the country's land in Lok Sabha in 1995, with the participation of all

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<sup>31</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (London: Meridian Books Ltd, 1946), 112.

<sup>32</sup> Adeney and Lall, "Institutional Attempts to build a 'National' Identity in India: internal and external dimensions," 258–286.

<sup>33</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, known as the Panchsheel Treaty denotes Non-interference in others internal affairs and respect for each other's territorial unity integrity and sovereignty (from Sanskrit, *panch*: five, *sheel*: virtues), are a set of principles to govern relations between states.

parties, constituted a clear expression of India's departure from the ideals it initially defended.

### **Redefining the Identity of India**

As stated before, identity is not an unchangeable phenomenon, it is determined as a result of a struggle between the ruling elites, it is constantly questioned, sometimes eroded and begins to change. The politicisation of Hindu nationalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a BJP (Baharatiya Janata Party) government between 1998 and 2004. During this time Hindu nationalists decided to implement education reforms in order to raise a new generation with the Hindu nationalist ideology which affected schools, staff and textbooks across the whole country. This intolerant ideology portrays all non-Hindu communities in India, especially the Muslim community as separate, second-class citizens, even as having loyalties outside of India. National Curriculum Framework for school education under the slogan of "Indianise, nationalise and spiritualise" involved a massive textbook revision in history and the social sciences which actively discriminated against the Muslim minority and denigrate Pakistan. It is often argued that India is not obliged to resort to identity politics for legitimacy, stability and survival, since Indian identity is not tied to Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> However, Hindu nationalism, which the BJP increasingly resorts to distract the impoverished Hindu masses from social and economic problems to preserve its power, invalidates this view.<sup>35</sup>

As a result of these policies books and textbooks, critical of certain aspects of Hinduism or Indian history started to be removed and replaced by pro-Hindutva literature which is based on the premise that India is a Hindu nation. According to Hindutva approach, any non-Hindus in India have to either accept the majority's domination or leave. The national identity that BJP is

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<sup>34</sup> As an example, see, Vali Nasr, "National identities and the India-Pakistan Conflict," in T. V. Paul ed., *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 178-201, 179.

<sup>35</sup> S. Gulden Ayman, "Kültürel Milliyetçilik Kışkacındaki Hindistan," (India: In the Grip of Cultural Nationalism) in Birse nOrs and Inci Kerestecioglu eds., *Toplum, Tarihve Siyaset Uzerine Yazılar: Prof. Dr. Cemil Oktay'aArmagan* (Society, History and Politics: Essays in Honour of Prof. Dr. CemilOktay), İstanbul: Baglam, forthcoming in 2021.

trying to implement is not a supra-religious, trans-traditional project, but an exclusionary search for an identity that takes Hindu culture at its centre as if it is unitary and created in isolation with other cultures. In reality as Taru Dalmia and David M. Malone explain, "Indianness," is a pluralistic identity influenced by simultaneously contending co-existing religions and belief systems, as well as shared cultural heritage, coalesced into Indian civilization. There are two broad phenomena in the history of India. The first is the repeated influx of peoples and ideas from the northwest (specifically from Afghanistan, Persia, and Central Asia), which occurred through invasions, but more often through migration, pastoral circuits, trade, and missionary travel. Second, foreign influences mostly were accommodated and assimilated, producing "cultural fusions". Since much colonial historiography was preoccupied with the differentiation between indigenous and alien communities Indian civilization came to be seen as essentially Hindu and Sanskritic while Turkish, Afghan, and Mughal chronicles were perceived as alien which is both a distortion and simplification of Indian history.<sup>36</sup>

### **Collective Victimization triggered by BJP**

Hindutva mindset includes a collective victimhood psychology shared by its group members that results from the perception of intentional harm inflicted by Muslim groups to Hindus a harm that is viewed as undeserved, unjust and immoral and one that Hindus were not able to prevent. Collective victimization of Hindus is used by BJP as a source of political power, and mobilization. When victimhood psychology is activated especially by rulers it usually escalates conflicts.<sup>37</sup>

Groups can suffer from collective victimization that is not based only on an objective experience but also on the social construction of it. Beliefs about victimhood, serve as a basis for construction of a common reality, culture, identity, communication, unity, solidarity,

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<sup>36</sup> Taru Dalmia and David M. Malone, "Historical influences on India's foreign policy," *International Journal* 67, no. 4 (2012): 1029-1049.

<sup>37</sup> Masi Noor, Nurit Shnabel, Samer Halabi and Arie Nadler, "When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, (January 2012): 351- 374, 351.

goal setting, co-ordinated activities. Beliefs that impart the status of victimhood are transmitted and disseminated via societal channels of communication and societal institutions. The educational system plays a major role in instilling those beliefs through textbooks, educational programmes, school ceremonies and teachers' explicit and implicit messages. In addition, the public discourse in speeches by leaders, newspaper articles and texts in various other channels of communication continuously strengthen the sense of collective victimhood. Cultural products like books, films are also used to transmit the beliefs and feelings of collective victimhood about the society's victimhood.<sup>38</sup>

One of the results of victimization process is to blame the perpetrator and the bystanders (groups who did not prevent the harm from being done) and nurturing vindictive feelings and intentions. Behavioural implications of victimhood suggest that measures should be taken to prevent any further harm and punish the opponent for the harm done.

Emotionally, the sense of victimhood is usually associated with anger, fear and self-pity reinforcing attitudes that express negative feelings towards the perpetrator. Collective victimhood may also lead to a reduced capacity for empathy. People in this state are unable to see things from the rival group's perspective, empathize with its suffering and accept responsibility for harm inflicted by its own group. The sense of victimhood often reduces the activation of moral considerations that prevent the group from committing harmful acts.

Hindutva frames Muslims as antagonistic to Hindu India and views the period of Muslim predominance as a foreign invasion. Hindutva narrations of historical wars that occurred between different kingdoms tend to be cut off from their geographic-historical contexts and become reframed as a series of wars between heroic indigenous Hindus and barbaric foreign Muslims. Prashant Waikar gives three important examples of this: the twelfth-century

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal, Lily Chernyak-Hai, Noa Schori, and Ayelet Gundar, "A sense of self perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts," *International Review of the Red Cross*, no. 874, June 30, 2009, <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/irrc-874-bartal-chernyakhai-schori-gundar.pdf>

battles between the Rajput Prithviraj Chauhan and Sultan Muhammad Ghauri, the sixteenth-century battles between the Rajput Maharana.

Pratap and the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the seventeenth-century battles between the Maratha ruler Shivaji and the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. According to the logic of Hindutva, Muslims only became Muslims out of fear and all Muslims in the region were originally Hindu. Besides, proponents of Hindutva views Muslim rulers as zealots who repeatedly destroyed Hindu temples across South Asia. In reality Hindu and Muslim rulers alike destroyed temples because they were sites of political and economic power, not just religious symbolism. However, as Prashant Waikar points out temples signified a sovereign's control over the region and also functioned as a storage facility for wealth. Regardless of their religious convictions, aspiring hegemons would seek to assert their control by destroying spaces of power associated with their rivals. Hindutva ideology imposes a modern understanding of temples as purely religious spaces onto the past that were destructed by Muslims seeking to prove the religious irreconcilability of between Muslims and Hindus.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most devastating implications of this discourse was the series of Hindu-Muslim riots which claimed over 2,000 lives in the aftermath of the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, by Hindutva militants who argued that the 460-year-old mosque ought to be destroyed in order to reconstruct the Hindu temple dedicated to the God-King Rama that was demolished.

Today, the country appears to be divided over the state of democracy in India. Democracy has long been one of the most important things that India is proud to have when talking about itself. It is also used to rationalize its alliances and strengthen cooperation with other democratic countries. India is a country that is gradually losing power in the ranking of democracy. While 47 percent of India Today Group-Karvy Insights Mood of the Nation (MOTN) respondents in the January 2021 survey believes that

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<sup>39</sup> Prashant Waikar, "Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi's Political Discourse," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 161-180.

India's democracy is not under any threat, 42 percent are concerned.<sup>40</sup>

Contrary to expectations, the emergence of India as a rising power in the international arena has not exposed a country that is the key to the peaceful resolutions, but a country that is at odds with itself.

### History of India-Afghan relations

Although India's diplomatic ties with Afghanistan officially began to develop in the 1950s the relations between the people of Afghanistan and India can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Following Alexander the Great's brief occupation, the successor state of the Seleucid Empire controlled the region known today as Afghanistan. In 305 BCE, they ceded much of it to the Indian Maurya Empire as part of an alliance treaty. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, northern India has been invaded by a number of invaders based in the territories like Ghaznavids, Khaljis, Mughals, Durranis etc. During these eras, many Afghans immigrated to India in order to escape from the unrest in their territories.

One of the images of the Afghan people that occupy a place in communal psychology in India derives from Tagore's legendary short story *Kabuliwallah* that provided a romantic image of the Afghans.<sup>41</sup> Written in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore in 1892, this short story tells about the friendship of a Pashtun merchant who came from Kabul to Kolkata every year to sell dried fruit and a young girl from a middle-class aristocratic family who lives there.<sup>42</sup> The story highlights the Pashtuns living in Calcutta and the interaction between Hindu culture and Pashtun culture.

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<sup>40</sup>"Mood of the Nation," *India Today*, January 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mood-of-the-nation-survey-2021>

<sup>41</sup> "The 'Kabuliwala' Afghans of Kolkata," *BBC News*, May 23, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-32377276>

<sup>42</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Short Stories from Rabindranath Tagore*, trans. Pratima Bowes, East-West Publications, United Kingdom, 1999; *Kabuliwala*, English Story, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et9VfrUE-Sw>



## Convergence of the External Dimensions of State Identities

Diplomatic relations between India and Afghanistan were established by the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, and mutual promises were made on the development of cultural and commercial relations. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the Bandung Conference, convened in 1955 created a common framework for a closer solidarity and cooperation between the two states. The conference, marked by the criticisms of Asia and Africa against colonialism, made it possible for the two countries to oppose the Cold War ideological polarizations together and at the same time to condemn Pakistan's increasingly taking the US side. Both India and Afghanistan supported cessation of the Cold War binaries, concerned about the consequences in South Asia. For India, the leader of the Non-Alignment Movement, this was also a response to Islamabad's signing of the Mutual Defense Agreement with Washington in May 1954 and its subsequent participation in SEATO (Central Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Southeast Treaty Organization).

Yet India's relationship with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) suffered a serious setback during the Sino-Indian War since there was little overt support for India from the third world. Only 40 countries responded positively to Nehru's international appeal for China to be declared an aggressor in November 1962, of which only three (Ethiopia, Cyprus, and Sri Lanka) were from the group of 25 non-aligned countries at the time.

In spite of great expectations from NAM, the member countries which were in the process of liberation from colonialization were to deal with basic problems such as famine, drought, epidemics, ignorance, and backwardness were not able carry institutional ties beyond the meetings. Furthermore, in the 1970s, the priorities of Afghanistan shifted. The increasing Soviet influence in Afghanistan obliged Afghan Prime Minister Daoud Khan to get closer to Pakistan. Though talks started with Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977 to resolve the border issue, contacts failed in April 1978, due to the overthrow of Daoud in a Soviet-backed coup.

## **Afghanistan's Muslim Identity**

Afghanistan is often considered as one of the “most Islamic” countries in the world. In fact Islam has been part of the Afghan political history for more than a thousand years and represents the main framework of reference of Afghan domestic politics and civilian social life. Regardless of the fact that many disagree with some of the most severe interpretations of Islam by the Taliban, most Afghans remain profoundly conservative in their way of life as Muslims.

Islam always used as a rallying-cry for the Afghan population in large when confronted with external threats. In the face of the Soviet invasion, both the rural population and sectors of disenchanted urban technocrats rallied around the call for a jihad (1980-1988), similar to those which had been invoked in response to earlier colonial invasions. There is little doubt in this context that Islam will continue to play a key role in shaping the future of Afghanistan.

Despite the close relations between India and Afghanistan, Islam is an undeniable element bringing these countries together. Afghanistan is never considered by India as a fully reliable partner because of this fact. India's discomfort with the ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan started with the entry of Pakistani Pashtun tribes into Kashmir and increased with the support of Islamabad for Kabul's participation in the World Federation of Muslims. Today the destructive character of the Kashmir problem still tests India's relations with Afghanistan. It should be kept in mind that although Kabul voted against Pakistan's membership to the UN, it avoided direct interference in the disputes between India and Pakistan. Especially on Kashmir problem Kabul refrained from openly taking a stand in favour of India and contented itself with supporting the UN's efforts towards a ceasefire. It was also seen during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War that the Afghan government protested the bombing of Peshawar and Kohat by Indian planes in Pakistan because these lands were regarded as an extension of Pashtunistan in Kabul's eyes. Additionally, during the crisis that resulted in the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, Kabul rejected New Delhi's offer to open a second front on the Pakistani border of Afghanistan.

In addition to these Afghanistan does not want to be a party to the conflicts between India and Pakistan also because it believes that the uncontrolled acceleration of the fragmentation dynamics in Pakistan will affect Afghanistan negatively in many ways. Kabul fears that the instability would increase the pressure on Pashtuns in Pakistan and prevent Islamabad from using the landlocked port of Karachi in Afghanistan. Lastly Kabul would not be happy to see India emerging as a very strong dominant power next to Afghanistan.

India has not approached Afghanistan on the basis of Hindu culture so far. However, under NDA regime not only the discrimination of Muslims internally provoked, but a different vision portrayed internationally as well.

The influence of press and media in shaping images of allies and enemies cannot be denied. Today, some high-cost Bollywood productions could be added to this. Particularly striking in this context are movies that depict the courage and fighting ability of the Hindus and show how Hindu fighters defend their homeland against the invading Muslim Barbarians.<sup>43</sup> A current example of these works dealing with the occupation of India by tribes from what is now called Afghanistan is the 2019 Indian epic-drama *Panipat*.<sup>44</sup> The warrior Indian state, known as the Maratha Empire or the Maratha Confederation, which existed in South Asia between 1674-1818 and ruled an area of 2.8 million km<sup>2</sup>. The movie, which tells about the destruction of the Afghan King Ahmed Shah Abdali (Durrani) in the Panipat War, draws attention to two things that led the Hindus to defeat, the first of which is the Muslims being able to join the same ranks against the Hindus when necessary. Another factor as important as this is the differences among themselves. The movie's ending with saying that "The future will belong to the Marathas" inevitably makes one think how this perspective will reflect to the present and future relations between India and Afghanistan.

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<sup>43</sup>Harris Zargar, "How Bollywood furthers India's Hindu Nationalism," *New Frame*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.newframe.com/how-bollywood-furthers-indias-nationalism/>

<sup>44</sup>*Panipat, The Great Betrayal*, <https://www.netflix.com/tr/title/81227047>

## Conclusion

India has employed internal and external balancing together with asymmetrical strategies to weaken Pakistan. India-Afghanistan strategic ties are not only instrumentalized to inflict damage to Pakistan's interests but also aimed at eliminating the possibility of the establishment of stronger relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though all these efforts complicated Pakistan's efforts to defend its interests they were unable to produce concrete, long-lasting outcomes forcing Pakistan to change its policies *vis a vis* India.

India can neither expect from the USA to adopt an unequivocal stance against Pakistan nor rely on the US for its influence in Afghanistan. Excessive dependence on the US would not only hamper India's ability to make its own strategic choices but also bring the risks of provoking China unnecessarily.

India can neither shape the future of Afghanistan alone nor able to endure its economic foothold without coming into terms with Pakistan. It should not be forgotten that the future of Afghanistan is a situation that concerns Pakistan much more than India. First of all, while India does not share a border with Afghanistan, Pakistan has a long border with this country of 2,250 km. As the former diplomat Melkulangara K. Bhadrakumar who has also served in Afghanistan and Iran as India's envoy once admitted, "In the zero-sum mindset, Delhi overlooked that Pakistan has legitimate interests in Afghanistan -- no less than what India would have in, say, Nepal -- and that by virtue of culture, tribal and ethnic affinity or sheer geography and economic and social compulsions, Afghans can never do without Pakistan."<sup>45</sup>

Equally important is the fact that Kabul cannot survive only with the support from India since it needs help from both countries it. However, in order for a durable solution to be found Afghanistan India should no longer be considered as a battleground of the struggle between India and Pakistan. What should bring the two countries together is the danger of the spill over of the instability throughout the region besides Kabul's needs.

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<sup>45</sup>Gilani, "Anxiety in India ..."

In order to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan positive developments are required in three levels that continuously affect each other. The first of these is the great power level that mainly comprises the relations between US, China and Russian Federation. The second is regional powers level includes countries like India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. The third level involves Taliban and the ethnic groups (including Pashtun groups that are not affiliated with the Taliban) in Afghanistan. Since it seems difficult to foresee great powers coming to terms with each other -especially when we think about US-China relations- and a durable reconciliation occur between different factions in Afghanistan without the global and regional actors' involvement the only option remained is a limited detente between the India and Pakistan that is acknowledged and supported by the US, China and Russia.

New Delhi needs to change the lenses, the vision through which any strategy would be based upon. Taking steps towards a peaceful relationship with Pakistan, saving Kabul from being the area of the India-Pakistan struggle will bring peace and tranquillity to the region and will ensure that the attention of South Asian countries is turned to the mostly needed; equality, social justice and development.

## Chapter No. 2

# Dynamics of Transformation in Indo-Bangladesh Relations

Prof. Dr. Moonis Ahmar\*

### Abstract

This paper will examine in detail the dynamics of transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations from four angles. First, the historical dynamics of Dhaka-New Delhi ties since the emergence of Bangladesh as a new state. Second, issues of discord between India and Bangladesh and how the two neighbours were bogged down in their troubled relations related to contentious matter. Third, how and why during the era of Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister (1996-2001 and 2009 till to date) a process of good neighbourly relations was unleashed by attempting to resolve the water issue and territorial disputes, particularly enclaves. Finally, how despite ostensible courtship between Bangladesh and India during Awami League's government there are issues which cause periodic friction and popular discontent against New Delhi's hegemonic designs and ambitions against its vulnerable neighbour. There are two schools of thought in Bangladesh on the question of Indo-Bangladesh relations. The first school of thought, which is led by BNP and Islamic parties, argues that Bangladesh should not put all its eggs in one basket by tilting heavily in favour of India and allow its dominant neighbour interference in their country's internal affairs. For them, Bangladesh needs to maintain its nationalist and Islamic identity by denying India a role which tried to make its neighbour subservient. The second school of thought led by Awami League is of the opinion

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that Bangladesh cannot ignore geographical realities as it is surrounded by India from three sides and must remain indebted to India's decisive role in helping gain independence from Pakistan during the liberation war of 1971. For them, taking advantage of India's economic vibrancy and its readiness to assist Bangladesh for economic and infrastructure development is in the interest of their country instead of seeking confrontation with its large and dominant neighbour.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Awami League, Narendra Modi, Border Security Force, Citizenship Amendment Act, National Register of Citizens.

## **Introduction**

Surrounded by three sides from India, Bangladesh holds a unique geographical position influencing its domestic and foreign policy. Over the years since its secession from Pakistan in December 1971, Bangladesh has transformed in terms of its relations with India which witnessed several ups and downs. This paper will examine in detail the dynamics of transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations from four angles. First, the historical dynamics of Dhaka-New Delhi ties since the emergence of Bangladesh as a new state. Second, issues of discord between India and Bangladesh and how the two neighbours were bogged down in their troubled relations related to contentious matter. Third, how and why during the era of Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister (1996-2001 and 2009 till to date) a process of good neighbourly relations was unleashed by attempting to resolve the water issue and territorial disputes, particularly enclaves. Finally, how despite ostensible courtship between Bangladesh and India during Awami League's government there are issues which cause periodic friction and popular discontent against New Delhi's hegemonic designs and ambitions against its vulnerable neighbour.

Furthermore, this paper will analyse how sovereignty of Bangladesh has been compromised during Awami League's government by allowing New Delhi to patronize pro-Indian elements against what is perceived as growing Chinese influence. Periodic incidents along the Indo-Bangladesh border where the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) is allegedly blamed for 'killing and shooting' of Bangladeshis involved in illegal crossing of the

border is a major issue engulfing the domestic politics and foreign policy of Bangladesh. According to a Bangladeshi academic, "Incidents of killing civilians along the border have been a major cause for concern in Bangladesh. In July last year, Bangladesh home minister informed parliament that a total of 294 Bangladeshis' were killed by the Indian BSF along the border in the last 10 years. The minister further informed that 66 Bangladeshi nationals were killed in 2009, 55 in 2010, 24 each in 2011 and 2012, 18 in 2013, 24 in 2014, 38 in 2015, 25 in 2016, 17 in 2017 and only 3 in 2018."<sup>1</sup> The BSF prefers to term such fatalities as "undesirable death" instead of killing. Following meetings between the Director Generals (DG) of BGB and BSF in Dhaka on June 12-15, 2019, the DG of BSF asserted that such incidents were "undesirable deaths, not killings." "He, however, admitted that lethal weapons were being used by the BSF personnel "in self-defense when miscreants launched attack on them." "This was in violation of the April 2018 accord under which both parties agreed not to resort to lethal weapons in dealing with cases of border crossing,"<sup>2</sup> If cordiality is still reflected in official relations between India and Bangladesh, sensitive issues particularly the one pertaining to periodic incidents of firing on Bangladeshi nationalist by the Indian BSF is a major reality and can neither be ignored nor undermined.

Some of the questions which will be raised and responded in this paper are:

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<sup>1</sup> C R Abrar, "Killings at the Bangladesh-India border" *Daily Star* (Dhaka), January 17, 2020. "In the first 15 days of 2020, three Bangladeshis have already been reportedly killed by BSF at the border. Such steep rise in border killing and the failure of the Indian authorities to take any meaningful measure to bring an end to border killing for years have, in all likelihood, cost it a lot of goodwill in Bangladesh. It has also placed the Bangladesh government in a difficult situation straining bilateral relations. It's time the policymakers in New Delhi brought an end to such a policy. Excessive use of force by the BSF is the principal precipitating factor in the persistence of killing of Bangladeshi nationals at the border. The border areas between the two countries are densely populated. Many people on both sides have lost farms and livelihood to riverbank erosion and are dependent on cross-border activities, such as cattle rusting and smuggling of other items. In many instances, people are killed and tortured merely on suspicion of being involved in smuggling. Children, allegedly employed by smugglers to reduce the risk of detection, also fall victim to such reckless use of lethal force". Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



- a) Why and how negative and positive *transformation* in Indo-Bangladesh relations took place over the years?
- b) What are the major *fault lines* in Indo-Bangladesh relations and how the regime of Sheikh Hasina has tried to downplay issues which are called as major irritants in their ties?
- c) How the elites of Bangladesh under the *patronage* of Awami League (AL) pursue a pro-Indian policy and is there a gap in elite-popular perceptions on dealing with India?
- d) How the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) has an *impact* on Indo-Bangladesh relations and to what extent the anti-Muslim policies during the Modi regime tend to have an influence on the public opinion in Bangladesh?
- e) What are the *options* for Pakistan to ameliorate its relations with Bangladesh in the light of a relative wedge in Indo-Bangladesh relations?

Certainly, since 2009 when Awami League returned to power till today, the graph of Indo-Bangladesh relations with India has gone up but the regime of Sheikh Hasina cannot appease and remain indifferent on issues which are a cause of promoting anti-Indian sentiments. Awami League has an age-old policy to malign Pakistan and exploit past happenings in order to dilute anti-Indian feelings in Bangladesh, but in the recent past, the 'Pakistan card' has lost its relevance as to every provocative act of Sheikh Hasina's government Islamabad has not reacted while arguing that no attempt by ruling Awami League to perpetuate hatred among the people of Bangladesh against Pakistan will be successful.

### **Dynamics of Indo-Bangladesh Relations**

While sharing border of 4,024 kilometres with India, Bangladesh holds a vulnerable position because of pressures from a strong neighbour. Geography certainly determines why's and how's of transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations as Bangladesh shares only a small strip of its territory with Myanmar whereas,

it shares the Bay of Bengal on its south while on the eastern, northern and western sides it is surrounded by India. Geographical vulnerability is a major reason why Bangladesh is dependent on its big neighbour.

According to an Indian writer, “the initial years (January 1972-August 1975) represented an era of good equation between the two countries. Anti-India feelings within Bangladesh were encouraged in the aftermath of Mujib era. Accordingly, dark clouds of discord engulfed cordiality in Indo-Bangladesh relations.”<sup>3</sup> J. N. Dixit, former Foreign Secretary and the first Indian Head of Mission to Bangladesh in his book, *Liberation And Beyond Indo-Bangladesh Relations* throws lights on the formative phase in Indo-Bangladesh relations by maintaining that:

India desired the closest economic, political and defence cooperation with Bangladesh. It also expected that the issues inherited from Indo-Pakistan relations from 1947 to 1972 would be resolved peacefully without acrimony and by mutual accommodation. Issues like the sharing of the Ganga waters, the exchange of enclaves<sup>4</sup> and the granting of mutual transit facilities for travel and tourism were expected to be sorted out in the context of goodwill and mutual cooperation which characterized India's relations with the Mujibnagar Government during the liberation struggle. As events from the second half of 1972 showed expectations proved to have lacked a clear understanding of deep undercurrents in the psyche of the Bangladesh power structure under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Indian anticipations also lacked in political realism, as we shall see in later developments.<sup>5</sup>

Further elaborating transformation of Bangladeshi approach and policy vis-à-vis New Delhi once Indian forces withdrew from

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<sup>3</sup> Nalinki Kant Jha, “India-Bangladesh Relations: A Perspective” in *India Quarterly* 56, no. 3/4 (July-December 2000): 15.

<sup>4</sup> The Bangladesh Government conveyed messages emphasizing its urgent desire to take possession of the enclaves which India was supposed to transfer to former East Pakistan under the Radcliff Award and subsequent agreements. He appointed Dr. Abbas as the Bangladesh co-chairman of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission which was to resolve the complex issue of the sharing of Ganga waters. Abbas had been the senior negotiator on behalf of Pakistan at discussions on the Farakka issue with India before liberation. He was a hardliner committed to the Pakistani negotiating stance. J. N. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond Indo-Bangladesh Relations* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1999), 158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

that country in March 1972, Dixit vividly argues that, "Bangladesh's attitude under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, though not expressed overtly and clearly, were quite different from Indian expectations. Mujib of course appreciated India's help in the liberation struggle. He desired a practical and friendly relationship with India. He was also conscious that if Bangladesh earned sufficient recognition from important countries and developed the minimum required levels of bilateral political, economic and technological relations, he would not need India's substantive support and assistance. In keeping with this approach, he was clear in his mind that he did not wish to be over-dependent on India. He also (quite logically) did not wish Bangladesh to be dubbed a client State of India, as was being anticipated by many political observers and analysts from different parts of the world. He was of the view that while pending disputes and issues should be resolved amicably through political dialogue, there was not going to be any compromises on the part of Bangladesh on issues which could affect Bangladesh's vital interests as perceived by him."<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, with the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Prime Minister, first President and founder of Bangladesh on August 15, 1975, in a coup launched by junior army officers in Dhaka, India lost its major ally and sizeable clout in Bangladesh. Consequently, Dhaka was able to pull itself out from India's dominating influence during the reign of General Zia-ur-Rehman who became President of his country in late 1975 till the time Sheikh Hasina the elder daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who survived the assassination of her father's family because of her absence from Bangladesh, became Prime Minister following 1996 general elections.

The why's of transformation of Indo-Bangladesh relations could be gauged from two perspectives. First, domestic dynamics of Bangladesh is significant where large segments of elites even during Pakistan days were under the influence of India. That how some of the political parties, student's and teacher's organizations were receptive to anti-West Pakistan tirade as to a large extent strings were being pulled across the border. However, the Indo-

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 156-57.

Bangladesh treaty of 1972 and the overt influence of India in shaping Dhaka's foreign and domestic policies proved to be counter-productive because not only public opinion turned against Mujib and Awami's League tilt towards India compromising on the sovereignty of Bangladesh, but resentment in the armed forces was also noticeable. Transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations reflected ground realities of Bangladesh where sovereignty and nationalism became fundamental reasons for challenging India's consistent manoeuvres to ensure that no government in Dhaka was able to formulate policies independent of New Delhi.

Second, a policy change in India takes place when Awami League comes to power as that political party since long is perceived to be soft on New Delhi. During the second tenure of Sheikh Hasina (2009-13) and her fourth term (2018 onwards) India made sure that its contentious issues with Bangladesh having negative fallout in public opinion of that country are sorted out. While the water issue with India (Farraka Barrage) was settled during the first term of Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001) border conflict particularly those related to enclaves were addressed in the second and third term of Sheikh Hasina. But it is during the fourth term of Sheikh Hasina from 2018 onwards where India has been able to provide substantial financial assistance to Bangladesh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi acknowledging during his visit to Dhaka that India played a pivotal role for the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. Yet, it is the reality of Bangladeshi nationalism spearheaded by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and quest for maintaining sovereignty which turned against India. The Muslim identity of Bangladesh which couldn't be marginalized despite all the efforts is a reality.

The slogan of Bangladeshi nationalism projected by BND reflected on Islamic and multicultural characteristics of Bangladesh whereas the slogan of Bengali nationalism focused on narrow identity of their country based on language and culture of Bengali people. The former advocated inclusive while the latter exclusive dimensions of nationalism. Therefore, when CAA and brutalities against Indian Muslims took place under the patronage of Modi regime, the reaction in Bangladesh was swift. Popular demonstrations in Dhaka and elsewhere against the lynching of

Indian Muslims and ill treatment of Bangladeshis in India caused a negative transformation about India in Bangladesh.

The how's of transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations needs to be examined while taking into account three major realities. First, the vacuum which was created after the surrender of Pakistan armed forces in the then East Pakistan on December 16, 1971 was partly filled by India. As a result of Mujib's insistence, Indian forces which played a crucial role in the liberation of Bangladesh were withdrawn in March 1972 but New Delhi tried to play security, political and economic role in the nascent state of Bangladesh by signing a treaty with Dhaka on March 19, 1972. Anti-Indian feelings surged during Mujib's era when large-scale looting of commodities and luxury items by the invading Indian army took place from former East Pakistan and these were transported to India. The March 1972 Indo-Bangladesh Treaty was termed as a compromise over the sovereignty of Bangladesh as it was argued that the domination of West Pakistan was replaced by India.

J. N. Dixit examines the joint declaration issued after the visit of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to Dhaka in March 1972 and the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in the following words:

The joint declaration outlined the future course of economic, technological, commercial and cultural cooperation between the two countries. The Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was patterned more or less on the earlier Indo-Soviet Treaty signed in August 1971, including clauses relating to security and defense cooperation.<sup>7</sup>

Those Bengali military personnel who were repatriated from Pakistan to Bangladesh in 1974 viewed India's entrenched influence in their country with contempt and suspicion. Whereas, the Indian government claimed to have played a pivotal role for the liberation of the people of the then East Pakistan from 'oppressive' rule of West Pakistan and in helping the new state of Bangladesh to settle down by rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure during 1971 war and providing substantial economic assistance. But the price of India's much projected help to Bangladesh was heavy: Dhaka had

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 152-53.

to relegate to New Delhi's terms of conditions and pledge not to have anything to do with Pakistan. Consequently, except Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's visit to Dhaka in June 1974 under the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman when he visited Lahore to attend second Islamic summit in February 1974, there was no activity which was aimed to normalize relations with Pakistan.

A major breakthrough in unleashing the process of normalization in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations took place when the two countries established formal diplomatic relations in January 1976 and the then President of Bangladesh Zia ur Rehman paid an official visit to Pakistan in December 1977. Second, if BNP was termed as soft on Pakistan, the Awami League possesses a track record of exploiting historical issues particularly those related to the military operation of 1971 and oppression by the West Pakistan dominated regimes on the Bengali population of East Pakistan. Whenever, Awami League comes to power it exploits 1971 episode to deepen cleavage with Pakistan and give space to India. Awami League and India used 'enemy images' against Pakistan and what is termed as mutual agreements to resolve age-old water issue and settling disputed enclaves.

Indo-Bangladesh relations during the regime of Awami League positively transformed as is evident from the first AL government during Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972-75) and then the government led by her daughter Sheikh Hasina 1996-2001 and 2008 to-date. In 2021, Bangladesh will celebrate 50 years of its independence from Pakistan and such an event will further provide an opportunity to India to remind Dhaka of the role which New Delhi played for helping gain independence from what they term 'oppressive' regime of West Pakistan.

There are two schools of thought in Bangladesh on the question of Indo-Bangladesh relations. The first school of thought, which is led by BNP and Islamic parties, argues that Bangladesh should not put all its eggs in one basket by tilting heavily in favour of India and allow its dominant neighbour interference in their country's internal affairs. For them, Bangladesh needs to maintain its nationalist and Islamic identity by denying India a role which tried

to make its neighbour subservient. The second school of thought led by Awami League is of the opinion that Bangladesh cannot ignore geographical realities as it is surrounded by India from three sides and must remain indebted to India's decisive role in helping gain independence from Pakistan during the liberation war of 1971. For them, taking advantage of India's economic vibrancy and its readiness to assist Bangladesh for economic and infrastructure development is in the interest of their country instead of seeking confrontation with its large and dominant neighbour.

Yet, during the current regime of Sheikh Hasina, one can observe growing discontent in Bangladesh about the surge of Hindu nationalism under the regime of BJP and its ally Shiv Sena. It is not only CAA and NRC which aims to target Muslims, particularly those who according to the Indian state had taken refuge in the Northeastern parts of India particularly in the state of Assam and have not gone to their country of origin i.e. Bangladesh, but also lynching of Indian Muslims by Hindu fanatics which has enraged the people of Bangladesh. According to a Pakistani writer, "despite BJP's anti-Muslim tirade, both Modi and Hasina continued to maintain closer ties through frequent high-level visits. Both nations signed 22 bilateral agreements, including one resolving a 1947 border dispute when Modi visited Bangladesh in 2015. During PM Hasina's visit to India in 2017, India pledged investments in Bangladesh worth \$5 billion. A 2018 tripartite nuclear pact commits India to facilitate Russia in building a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh. In a message on Mujib Barsho (Mujib anniversary), India called for diversifying Indo-Bangladesh relations, adding trade in services to the existing trade in goods."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> InamulHaq, "Changing times – Bangladesh's emerging alliances" *The Express Tribune*, July 29, 2020. According to the same author, "when the staunchly pro-Indian government of AL headed by PM Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangladesh's founding father Mujibur Rahman, rebuffs repeated meeting requests by India's high commissioner, Riva Ganguly Das for the last four months, something has gone awry. Other indicators are the slowing pace of all Indian projects since PM Hasina's re-election in 2019 and Dhaka's preference to Chinese-financed infrastructure projects. Contracting the new terminal of Sylhet airport, bordering India's sensitive northeastern region, to the Beijing Urban Construction Group (BUCG) is one such example". Ibid.

Therefore, the visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Dhaka scheduled to take place in March 2020 was cancelled when Hafazat-e-Islamic, a conglomeration of Islamic groups in Bangladesh threatened that they will not allow Modi to land in Dhaka because of his role in the persecution and killings of Indian Muslims. They also resented the manner in which Amit Shah, President of BJP and India's Home Minister threatened to expel Bangladeshis from India.

While summing up why's and how's of transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations two major factors need to be taken into account. First, the dynamics of domestic politics of Bangladesh and second, the emergence of China as a major factor in Bangladesh foreign policy particularly Beijing's enormous investments in that country and projecting itself as an alternative to India. So far, Bangladesh has not taken any firm and clear position of the issue of China joining South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as a full member, but it seems with the massive growth of Beijing's investments in Bangladesh, Dhaka will certainly tilt in favour of the first second economic power.

### **Fault lines in Indo-Bangladesh Relations**

Fault lines in bilateral relations must be analyzed in order to understand the dynamics of conflict and cooperation. Likewise, in case of Indo-Bangladesh relations, one can figure out two major fault lines which shape ties between the two neighbouring countries. These fault lines possess the potential of jeopardizing Indo-Bangladesh relations provided the regime in Dhaka is resilient enough to withstand pressures and unresolved issues. First, sovereignty is an issue in Indo-Bangladesh relations which since the emergence of that new state tends to raise questions about the viability of ties between the two neighbouring countries. From the historical point of view, Bangladeshis are quite sensitive about the sovereignty and identity of their country despite the fact that Bangladesh is surrounded by India from three sides. They are also mindful to the fact that without India's overt and significant assistance to them during the liberation war, it would have been quite difficult for them to seek independence from Pakistan. It is a periodic reminder from the Indian side of the favour which they rendered to Awami League leadership in exile in Calcutta and



training/support provided to Mukti Bahini which makes it difficult for them to deny New Delhi's crucial contribution for the independence of their country. Many Bangladeshis argue that it would have been better for them had they not taken Indian favour and struggled for independence from Pakistan on their own. It would have taken them more time to seek liberation but would not have provided India an opportunity reminding them of their favour from time to time and remain under the 'burden' of Indian favour.

Therefore, "Mujib had come to the conclusion by the first quarter of 1973 that the only way to neutralize this negative propaganda and affirm Bangladesh's independent status and capacity for freedom of options in foreign and defence related policies was to normalize and expand relations with Pakistan, China and, if possible, with the USA and simultaneously to reassert Bangladesh's Islamic identity by becoming part of the OIC."<sup>9</sup> Dixit rightly pointed out that:

The honeymoon phase of Indo-Bangladesh relations came to an end by the spring of 1973. The symptoms which confirmed there were certain leaders of the Awami League, such as Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed, questioning India's motivations in trying to be of economic and security assistance to Bangladesh. These elements promoted the view that India's primary motivation for supporting the Bangladesh liberation war was its own strategic interests (not correct!). They went on to assert that India's extensive economic assistance to Bangladesh in 1972 was part of the same game plan with the ultimate motive of dominating Bangladesh. They advocated that Bangladesh should restore relations with Pakistan, China and the United States and the oil-rich countries of the Gulf, emphasizing that such diversification of its foreign relations would neutralize India's domineering influence.<sup>10</sup>

If the honeymoon period in Indo-Bangladesh relations was over by early 1973, those resenting New Delhi's influence in Dhaka's policy-making process and holding India responsible for famine, corruption and nepotism unleashed by the ruling Mujib family found India as a scapegoat of ordeals faced by Bangladeshis. Critics accuse Awami League of compromising on the sovereignty of Bangladesh by giving India a free hand. But it seems, in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 175.

recent past there is some transformation in the policy of Awami League's government vis-à-vis its age-old friend India. This change also becomes relevant in the wake of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of Bangladesh in which India played a pivotal role and one can expect New Delhi of repeating its favour and reminding Dhaka that it should remain grateful to India as without their support they wouldn't have gained independence from Pakistan so soon. Issues of sovereignty of Bangladesh since its independence in 1971 revolve around matters involving India namely water, enclaves, killing of Bangladeshis by the BSF and dumping of Indian goods in their markets because of highly unfavourable trade balance between Dhaka and Delhi.

Recent issues causing irritants in Indo-Bangladesh relations range from Dhaka's perception that India is not doing enough to help Bangladesh repatriate Rohingya refugees; the concern expressed by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in October 2019 about the National Register of Citizens (NRC), periodic killing of Bangladeshis by the BSF under the pretext of smuggling and illegal migrants. In the wake of NRC related protest in India, Bangladesh cancelled the visit of its Home and Foreign Ministers to India in December 2019.

And there is also the thorny and an age-old issue of Teesta River which is the fourth largest river among the 54 rivers shared by India and Bangladesh. An article in *The Indian Express* explains Indo-Bangladesh dispute over Teesta River as: "the two countries were on the verge of signing a water-sharing pact in September 2011, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was going to visit Bangladesh. But, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee objected to it, and the deal was scuttled. After Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, he visited Dhaka in June 2015 — accompanied by Mamata Banerjee — and told Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina that he was confident they could reach a "fair solution" on the Teesta through cooperation between central and state governments. Five years later, the Teesta issue remains unresolved."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Shubhajit Roy, "Explained: China Twist in India-Bangladesh Teesta River Challenged," *The Indian Express*, August 21, 2020.

Second, domestic politics is another fault line in Indo-Bangladesh relations because one can observe a wide contradiction in perceptions about India at the popular and elite level. As pointed out earlier, elites of Bangladesh are the actual beneficiary of their country's independence from Pakistan and are indebted to New Delhi for their crucial support in this regard. The Bangladeshi intelligentsia, particularly the one composed of media, both print and electronic, by and large tilts in favour of India. Same is true as far as academic associations are concerned. Bangladeshi military, which after the assassination of Mujib had clear anti-India stance because of growing Indian interference in the affairs of their country, seem to have been neutralized. Whereas, bureaucracy, if not pro-Indian, is not hostile to their neighbour.

As far as political parties are concerned, there certainly exists deep division and cleavage as the ruling party i.e. Awami League has never taken an anti-Indian position particularly during the era of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina because its leadership is still grateful to New Delhi for rendering valuable help and assistance for the liberation of their country from Pakistan. Whereas, other political parties namely BNP do not possess pro-Indian stance. Jatiya party (Ershad) forged an alliance with Awami League in previous elections and has a tilt towards India. The Islamic parties in Bangladesh felt a great set back when *Jamaat-i-Islami* was banned during the third term of Sheikh Hasina. Jamaat always had an anti-Indian stance because of New Delhi's overt support to Awami League and its policy to deepen its influence in their country. Domestic political fault line clearly divides the public opinion of Bangladesh as pro and anti-Indian.

The real test of Indo-Bangladesh relations will come in 2021 when the political scene of Bangladesh will be heavily influenced because of celebrations commemorating 50<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Bangladesh. Will Awami League, a political party which under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spearheaded struggle against West Pakistani domination appreciate Prime Minister Narendra Modi presiding over the ceremony celebrating 50 years of Bangladesh? Will the public opinion of Bangladesh, particularly those who are mindful of their country's sovereignty being mortgaged before India during Sheikh Hasina's tenure accept India's leading role in 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Bangladesh?

There is no likelihood of Indian government reversing CAA and NRC in 2021 and Amit Shah's hostile attitude towards Bangladeshi immigrants in India. In that case, it will be a major test case for the regime of Sheikh Hasina to accommodate the Indian participation in 2021 celebrations because it is certain that Modi will face enormous domestic opposition particularly from those who are deadly against his anti-Muslim acts. BJP's drive to transform India as a Hindu state is certainly condemned in Bangladesh particularly by those political parties and groups who want to maintain Muslim identity of their country.

### **The Way Forward**

Arguably, even if Bangladesh is surrounded by India from three sides; the pro-Indian lobby is well-entrenched and New Delhi keeps reminding to its geographically besieged neighbour that it should be grateful for the help which it rendered to Bangladesh during its liberation war from Pakistan. Fifty years down the road, ground realities are not such which existed in Indo-Bangladesh relations in 1972. Now Bangladesh is better off because of its vibrant economy, per capita income, economic growth rate and foreign exchange reserves and is not dependent on India as it was earlier. The level of confidence held by Bangladesh and its government while dealing with external and internal matters reflects that the country is now in good shape and has come out from decades of crises at economic and political level.

Yet, to a large extent prudence has replaced emotional mindset in Dhaka as in the last five decades, Bangladesh has learned lessons from negative and positive transformation in Indo-Bangladesh relations and Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. In the past, it was unimaginable in Dhaka and Delhi, that the Bangladesh Prime Minister will not meet the Indian High Commissioner despite requests. According to the Indian newspaper *The Hindu* quoting from *BhorerKagoj*, a prominent Bengali daily from Dhaka that, "Despite India's concern, Bangladesh has given the contract of building an airport terminal in Sylhet to a Chinese company. Indian High Commissioner Riva Ganguly Das tried for four months to get an appointment with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh but did not get it. Bangladesh has not even sent a note of appreciation to India in response to Indian assistance for the COVID-19 pandemic", said

the newspaper's editor Shyamal Dutta in an article on the recent tilt of Dhaka towards Pakistan and China"<sup>12</sup>.

On the issue of recent downward trend in Indo-Bangladesh relations, an Indian writer Shantanu Mukharji in an article, "Delhi must preserve ties with Dhaka" in August 4, 2020, issue of *The Statesman* argues that, "As she amply demonstrated in her promises and actions, Hasina accommodated all Indian interests including security concerns and always walked the extra mile to allay India's worries. On its part, however, as believed by Bangladesh watchers, India probably fell short of meeting Bangladesh's expectations especially on its legitimate demands of seeking a share of Teesta waters. The Chinese aggression in Ladakh gave a ready opportunity to the Chinese to send overtures to Bangladesh in an apparent attempt to wean it away from India. In this context, those who favour strong India-Bangladesh ties suspect that a noted industrialist known for his proximity to PM Hasina and who is a key advisor, may be attempting to spoil friendly bilateral ties with New Delhi. He is said to have a soft corner for China and has been encouraging China to invest in Bangladesh. His closeness to Pakistan is also not ruled out by knowledgeable quarters. A few days ago, a Dhaka newspaper castigated India for inordinate delays in completion of projects. The report quoted figures to say India was responsible for the inertia in completing time-bound projects."<sup>13</sup>

Pragmatically speaking, ground realities are such that no Bangladeshi government can overtly offend India particularly when New Delhi over the decades has been able to entrench its influence in the corridors of power in Dhaka. In a video interview of Lt. General (ret'd) Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy of Bangladesh army with a US-based journalist, Kanak Sarwar, on July 14, 2020

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<sup>12</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, "Sheikh Hasina did not meet Indian envoy despite requests: Dhaka daily," *The Hindu*, July 25, 2020. Ms. Hasina's increasing diplomatic interactions with Pakistan and Pakistan's traditional supporter China is also being viewed as a move to bargain with India on issues of Dhaka's special interest, especially the CAA, which remains a sticking issue for Bangladesh as it is weary of hosting more refugees in addition to the 1.2 million Rohingya from Myanmar currently residing in Chittagong's Kutupalong". Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Shantanu Mukharji, "Delhi must preserve ties with Dhaka", *The Statesman*, August 4, 2020.

seriously criticized India claiming for example that important appointments in Bangladesh, including those involved “in the intelligence agencies, Chief of Army staff appointments, transfers of secretaries etc.” get “manipulated” by Indian intelligence – therefore take on greater significance at this time.”<sup>14</sup> It seems there is a paradigm shift in Bangladesh military because to a large extent its high command was suspicious of India and its interference in their country’s internal affairs, including periodic cases of firing by the Indian BSF killing illegal crossing of Bangladeshis in India.

If Bangladesh is able to maintain its economic growth rate, overcome corruption and ensure good governance, no power on earth can threaten its sovereignty or interfere in its internal affairs. This concept applies in other cases also where weak and vulnerable states are an easy target of political ambitions of their powerful neighbours. With the application of optimum human, financial, material and natural resources and dealing with its domestic contentious issues, Bangladesh can certainly cope with pressures and challenges from the Indian side.

Domestic and foreign policy dynamics of Bangladesh provides Pakistan a useful opportunity to mend fences with Dhaka. Recent initiatives at the official level from Pakistan are also aimed to normalize relations with Bangladesh which were badly hurt in the last eight years because what Dhaka alleged Islamabad’s alleged interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh by condemning the handing of some leaders of banned *Jamaat-i-Islami* as a result of proceedings of Dhaka based International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh. Since that phase is over it is time reciprocal and bilateral efforts are made to revitalize Pakistan-Bangladesh relations before the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Bangladesh.

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<sup>14</sup> David Bergman, “The Bangladesh government is likely to brand a retired military officer criminal and traitor” in *South Asia Journal*, July 18, 2020. <http://southasiajournal.net/the-bangladesh-government-is-likely-to-brand-the-retired-military-officer-a-criminal-and-traitor/> accessed on August 17, 2020.

## Chapter No. 3

# Sino-Pak Strategic Partnership and its Impact on India and Afghanistan

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and Dr. Mufti Almas Gul\*\*

### Abstract

In the current global world, where South Asia acquires a central geo-political importance due to many factors including Kashmir issue, Afghan War and India-Pakistan conflict, the most important part of this region is the strategic partnership existing between China and one of the strongest countries in the region, Pakistan. In the realm of International Relations as there are no permanent friends as well as no permanent enemies and it is only the interests that remains permanent. Pakistan and China have maintained a strategic partnership based on these mutual interests. Pakistan in this partnership is looking forward to building its economy; protect itself from outside aggression as well as of view of maintaining a close relationship with China, which has proved as a long-standing friend in all weathers of peace and conflict. This partnership, however, have impacts on South Asian region. The very important of which is Balance of power in the region. India, which is economically, politically and in terms of military budget more powerful than any country in the region including Pakistan has the fear of Chinese interventions. China has also controlled economies of South Asia by being their major exporter. Beijing is also playing a vital role in Afghan peace process and is somewhat trying to promote Pakistani interests in the neighbouring country.

**Keywords:** China, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Strategic partnership.

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## **Introduction**

China after its independence under Mao Xi Dong started developing relations with the world community including its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia. It presented its five principles of co-existence which included Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs of one another, mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. In the 1950s the relationship between China and Pakistan were not on the positive track as there existed issues related to border demarcation between both the countries. However, due to the interest of both the countries as well as India's emergence as a common threat, their association with one another has been on a positive track since 1960s. Pakistan being a very important member of the US led bloc in the Cold War never worked against the Beijing interests and in the 1970s offered its services to develop a connection between Beijing and the West including the United States. Although Beijing and Islamabad both sides faced a lot of challenges, they never worked against one another and further established an unusual connection with one another which can be called a strategic partnership. Both states have been working closely in areas of defence, economy and on the political forefront. However, with the advancement in Sino-Indian relations in the late 1980s, China at a few occasions showed its neutrality during the issues between the two subcontinent powers. However, with the increasing Chinese interests in Pakistan like China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is an essential part of Chinese One Belt One Road initiative or recently termed as Belt and Road Initiative, both partners witnessed a visible and distinct strategic partnership being evolved. Though China's policy has always evolved around the policy of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, it has supported Pakistan on various issues and has helped Pakistan in projects like JF-17 Thunder, Nuclear power plants and supporting its Afghan policy.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

In the arena of International relations, there is no concept of permanent friends and enemies. The relationship between states in the global world revolves around national interests. There are times when the goals and aims within the national interests are



short termed and sometimes, they stay for longer. Strategic partnership is not a new phenomenon. It existed centuries back between different empires and states. The strategic partnership between the Christian countries in Europe against the Muslim Ottoman Empire was one of the best examples of such partnerships.

Alliance system has always remained part of global politics whether it is the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, the two destructive world wars or the cold war in the bipolar world. With the arrival of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, one can witness an increasing number of strategic partnerships on the platform of world politics.

The word strategic is being derived from 'strategy', which means 'to define the use of accessible resources to gain any objective'.<sup>1</sup> Whatever asset a state has available, it can use it to achieve its goals related to defence, politics or economy etc. Partnership is, 'the 'special' role of affinity with other states'.<sup>2</sup> In the modern era, one needs to be strategic in order to gain from the global world. Living in isolation and achieving everything on one's own isn't an option in this globally connected world. 'Becoming involved in strategic associations means being insightful, future-oriented, flexible, practical, working off the front-foot, and making and taking choices grounded on evidence and calculations'.<sup>3</sup> Being involved in a calculated strategic partnership makes a state in advantageous position over its adversaries because it makes you go calculated.

Different states go into such a linkage for different reasons. For some states, it is because of increasing their might on the stage of global politics, defence and economy. This helps boost their image and they are able to govern the world their way. While for some states, especially the weak ones, it is to protect themselves from aggression of adversaries, to give support to their crippling

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Howard, "The strategic approach to international relations," *British Journal of International Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 67-75.

<sup>2</sup> Dinmuhammed Ametbek, "The Basis of Strategic Partnership," ANKASAM. July 15, 2017. <https://ankasam.org/en/the-basis-of-strategic-partnership/>.

<sup>3</sup> Sue Barrett, "So what does being strategic really mean?," *Smart Company*. April 22, 2012. <https://www.smartcompany.com.au/marketing/sales/so-what-does-being-strategic-really-mean/>.

economy and to have a partner in international forums. 'One of the most vital features of a strategic linkage is durability: a strategic linkage denotes to a partner's responsibility to advance long-term associations. The partners must have a like capability and power to affect the development of relations between them, for permanency, continuousness, and mutual benefit of collaboration. Main characteristics of strategic associations are their reciprocal nature of exchange, the ability to mend and remain pliable and strong despite the difficulties or misunderstandings'.<sup>4</sup> All these characteristics make such a relationship to remain beneficial for both the parties involved. Remaining focused in such an association is also imperative. It is very important when it comes to the gaining of short-term benefits from other countries. One needs to be focused, keeping in mind its strategic partnership with the other state. 'Strategic linkages necessitate united drive, focus, occasionally hard negotiating, a flexible bargaining stance and always political authority'.<sup>5</sup>

There are a few important principles for strategic partnership in the field of Business, which also stands true when it comes to the realm of International relations. First of them is focus on priorities. Every state must be clear on what their priorities are. They should not get into stuff that is secondary to them. Their main aim must be to get the primary goals first. And if there are some secondary or tertiary goals, which can intersect with the goals of the partner, they should avoid focusing on that. 'Conflict is unavoidable, particularly in the initial phases, and interest-based problem solving is the finest method of tackling them..... focusing on interests, producing option which are beneficial jointly'.<sup>6</sup> Both the partners should try to work for the benefit of both. It shouldn't be a win-lose situation, rather a non-zero-sum process.

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<sup>4</sup> Ieva Gajauskaitė, "Strategic Partnerships in Foreign Policy: Comparative Analysis of Polish - Ukrainian and Lithuanian - Ukrainian Strategic Partnership," *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, January 2013: 189-229.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Grevi, "Making EU strategic partnerships effective," *FRIDE Working Paper 105*, December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> James Henderson and Charles Dhanaraj, "Strategic Partnerships," *IMD*. 2014. <https://www.imd.org/contentassets/8d81e92f7a5d4931805a0466143ea8c6/36---strategic-partnerships-final-20.05.14.pdf>.

The second most vital principle of strategic association is the focus on mutual goals. However, it is alright to have individual goals, but much attention should be drawn upon goals that are common and are beneficial to both. 'Any association whether it is huge or small will work finest when there is a mutual goal. The basis and the adhesive to hold the partnership together is established by setting common goals'.<sup>7</sup> The individual goals should also be not directed against one another.

The third very essential principle to the working of a strategic association is good communication. Whenever there is a communication gap between partners in any kind of relationship, it creates distrust and scepticism between partners. 'Basis of successful strategic association is laid by clear communication, guaranteeing lucidity of objectives, trust and durable linkages'.<sup>8</sup> Good communication also results in transparency between the partners, which is very essential when one talks of a working relationship.

Each partner in an association must have ability to defuse tensions whenever it arises. This is the fourth principle of a working strategic linkage. 'They defused much of the tension in the beginning, so when new crinkles did arise, they were more easily in a position to avoid high impediments and interruptions in their activities that they were pursuing together'.<sup>9</sup> Internal tensions can account for breakage of a strategic partnership, as 'internal strain is a reason for the inabilities of strategic partnerships'.<sup>10</sup> This implies

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Parisi, "The power of partnerships: Why businesses are better together," *The globe and mail*. October 17, 2017. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/leadership-lab/the-power-of-partnerships-why-businesses-are-better-together/article36529258/>.

<sup>8</sup> James Henderson and Charles Dhanaraj, "Strategic Partnerships," *IMD*. 2014. <https://www.imd.org/contentassets/8d81e92f7a5d4931805a0466143ea8c6/36---strategic-partnerships-final-20.05.14.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth De Backer, and Eileen Kelly Rinaudo, "Improving the management of complex business partnerships," *mckinsy*. March 21, 2019. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/improving-the-management-of-complex-business-partnerships#>.

<sup>10</sup> T K Das, and Bing Sheng Teng. "Instabilities of Strategic Alliances: An Internal Tensions Perspective." *Organization Science* 11, no. 1 (2000): 77-101.

that resolving internal tensions is very important for to carry out a successful strategic association.

These four principles of priority focus, mutual goals, good communications and transparency and the ability to defuse tensions are the basis of an effective and long-standing strategic association.

### **Sino-Pakistan Strategic partnership:**

Sino-Pakistan linkage is very unique in the international community. Though ambassadorial linkages between both the countries started in the early 1950s, it wasn't until the 1960s that the constructive and friendly associations came to surface. Pakistan, being on the side of the capitalist powers against the policies of communism throughout the cold war era. However, Pakistan never worked against China in the alliances which she joined like SEATO and CENTO. 'In the 1955's conference at the Indonesian city of Bandung, Zhou En-lai brought into the notice of the participants that Pakistan's then President, Mohammed Ali, had guaranteed him that, though Pakistan was a signatory of SEATO, she was never hostile to China nor feared hostility from her'.<sup>11</sup>

The steadiness graph in these linkages has always remained constant. Linkages between these two states are extraordinary and exceptional because it has stayed enduring and ever lasted amid all the fluctuations going on in the world and the region. This connection is fostered by mutual confidence and interests. Both partners understood each other's issues. China always accepted the fact that in order to achieve some gains from the US, Pakistan had to continue good working partnership with her. On the other hand, Pakistan was always aware of China's financial benefits from the Indian markets and that it had to keep the relationship to flourish its economy. 'China's importance in the situation of its increasing influence upon India was understood by Pakistan and she decided to use that in a positive manner without affecting its relationship with China'.<sup>12</sup> China, in this way, achieved an economic boom and the position of a power in the Asian region, while Pakistan played

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<sup>11</sup> W M Dobell, "Ramifications of the China-Pakistan Border Treaty." *Pacific Affairs* 37, no. 3 (1964): 283-295.

<sup>12</sup> Haris Raqeeb Azeemi. "55 Years of Pakistan-China Relationship." *Pakistan Horizon* 60, no. 2 (2007): 109-124.

the role of a frontline ally of the US against erstwhile Soviet Union but both partners never let their connections get frozen.

The 1962 border conflict between China and India in the disputed area resulted in making relationship between Beijing and Islamabad to go on formal terms. 'The basis of the Sino-Pakistan connections was laid by the estrangement in ties between Beijing and New Delhi after the 1962 skirmishes. The then Pakistan President Ayub Khan assessed that the border skirmishes between these two would be short term and limited but will be followed by a longer Cold War. This stood true'.<sup>13</sup> Souring of relations between Beijing and New Delhi resulted in opening up horizons in Sino-Pak associations. 'In some ways the border skirmish between Chinese and Indians in 1962 resulted in opening of China to Pakistan'.<sup>14</sup>

China and Pakistan signed two landmark agreements. The first one was a border agreement between Beijing and Islamabad. Pakistan recognized Chinese share in Ladakh and Kashmir, while China gave up some of the land it claimed to Pakistan. Since then, 'the border agreement between Beijing and Islamabad is highly regarded as a significant milestone'.<sup>15</sup> The second important agreement after the border skirmishes was bilateral trade agreement in 1963 between China and Pakistan. Both granted the status of Most Favored Nation to one another. This resulted in increased economic cooperation and increased trade volume. 'Agreements between both the states resulted in a growth of Pakistani exports from \$73.4 million in 1970 to \$192.8 million by 1979'.<sup>16</sup>

After no US support during the Indo-Pakistan wars and arm embargos by the US, even after helping the US by providing its airbases against USSR and being an active member of western

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<sup>13</sup> Riaz Khokar, "An Insight Into Pakistan'S View On Sino-Indian Relations." *South Asian Voices*. June 17, 2020. <https://southasianvoices.org/an-insight-into-pakistans-view-on-sino-indian-relations/>.

<sup>14</sup> Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema. "Significance Of Pakistan - China Border Agreement of 1963." *Pakistan Horizon* 39, no. 4 (1986): 41-52.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Zahra Khan Durrani, "Pak-China Trade: Free Trade Agreements." *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research*. September 6, 2018. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/trade-economics/pak-china-trade-trade-free-trade-agreements/>.

alliances like CENTO and SEATO, Pakistan started digging up new options for itself. 'Pakistani Leadership was angry over the decision of the US to impose an arm embargo when the former needed its help the most, calling it a disrespect to an ally. Bhutto conveyed his fury over the US decision by informing the US representative that since Pakistan was solely depended on the US for arms and India has other suppliers too, it will affect Pakistan more'.<sup>17</sup> During this hour of need, China seemed as the best option and later on it verified to be an "all weather friend."

During the former USSR invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistani intelligence agencies worked for the US and trained *Mujahideen* with the help of Saudi Arabia and the UK. During this time period, the world witnessed a very close relationship between the US and Pakistan. This period was very challenging for both Islamabad and Beijing. China had concerns about the *Mujahideen* infiltration in Xinjiang. Pakistan was threatened at the Eastern border due to its focus on the western neighbour. India being a close ally of the former USSR threatened Pakistan's eastern border, as the wounds of 1971 war were still a fresh. 'Moscow's backing of separatist movement in Xinjiang province posed a serious concern to Beijing'.<sup>18</sup> However, Pakistan didn't bring any change in its relationship with China. China became Pakistan's number one trading partner. 'The speeches made by the leaders of the two countries..... showed that no shift has taken place in their policies vis-à-vis South and South-West Asia'.<sup>19</sup> During Zia's visit to Beijing in early 1980s, a joint ministerial committee was made. Its principle task was to toil for the rise in economic cooperation between both the partners. After the signing of Geneva accords, USSR withdrawal and disintegration of Soviet Union; the working partnership between Pakistan and US was halted by the Pressler Amendment. 'In late 1990, US as always turned its eyes from Pakistan as its main

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<sup>17</sup> Rabia Akhtar, "Pakistan's US problem: the first betrayal." *The Express Tribune*. May 26, 2017. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1419333/pakistans-us-problem-first-betrayal>.

<sup>18</sup> Manzoor Khan Afridi and Musab Yousufi. "Pak-China Joint Strategy against the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan." *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 3, no. 3 (2014): 66-73.

<sup>19</sup> Zubeida Mustafa, "Pakistan's Foreign Policy – A Quarterly Survey." *Pakistan Horizon* 35, no. 4 (1982): 3-9.

aim of the defeat the Soviets was achieved. American President Bush (senior) declined to confirm that there were no nuclear explosives possessed by Pakistan. This resulted in the imposition of sanctions on the latter under the Pressler Amendment (1985) in the Foreign Assistance Act'.<sup>20</sup> During this tough time, Chinese supported Pakistan and in return received trust from its Pakistani counterparts as well as access to other countries via Pakistan.

With the arrival of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the relationship status between US and Pakistan changed one again and latter was termed as a major non-NATO ally due to its shared role in US war on terror. This status makes them eligible for various defence and security commitments with the U.S which others cannot achieve. There is no security umbrella for a country with such a status, however, helps in terms of defence and economy. Repercussions of this war were faced by China as well. A number of Chinese engineers and workers working in Pakistan have been attacked by various Islamic and separatist groups. 'More than 50% of all attacks on Chinese workers or CPEC projects have been carried out by Takfiri Islamist groups and more than 30% by Baloch separatist groups'.<sup>21</sup> However, Beijing understood that it is carried out by the anti-Pakistani groups and didn't make it a hurdle to come between them and Islamabad. They were aware of the utility of the CPEC being a vital flagship venture of the BRI.

In the new century, China also developed close trade relations with India. 'Beijing came to surface as India's chief trading partner, replacing the US, in the timeline of April 2008-February 2009'.<sup>22</sup> However, this didn't resolve all its problems with India including the border arrangement. 'China gripped its difference on border with India to the Asian Development Bank in 2009, where it

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<sup>20</sup> Nazia Malik, "Economic Sanctions Imposed on Pakistan and Their Impact (1979 -1990)." *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research*. 2010. <http://www.ipedr.com/vol39/028-ICITE2012-K00006.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Jawad Syed. "Terrorising the Belt and Road: A critical analysis of security threats to Chinese nationals and businesses in Pakistan." *LUMS*. November 2, 2017. [https://cpmi.lums.edu.pk/sites/default/files/media-browser/cpec\\_security\\_paper\\_js\\_18nov17.pdf](https://cpmi.lums.edu.pk/sites/default/files/media-browser/cpec_security_paper_js_18nov17.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, "India-China Relations in the 21 st Century: Impact on Regional and Global Politics." *Pakistan Horizon* (Pakistan Institute of International Affairs) 65, no. 2 (2012): 59-72.

blocked an application by India for a credit that comprised of development projects in the North-eastern Indian state'.<sup>23</sup> Rising US-Indian linkages in various fields especially the nuclear deal also threatened Chinese interests in Pacific zone of Asia. 'In the developing complex environment of the Asia-Pacific, the Indo-US nuclear agreement and arrangements of Indian Japanese in economic and military arena further poses a threat to Chinese interests.'<sup>24</sup> Indian Défense Minister Antony showed his worries over Sino-Pakistan military relations in November 2008 by saying that 'The increasing connection between Beijing and Islamabad in the domain of defence remains a serious apprehension'.<sup>25</sup> He forgot to observe that Pakistan's military preparations were and are based purely on defensive grounds. Pakistan is a peace-loving country and any such purchase or readiness was to shatter the dreams of the enemy.

### **China's relationship with South Asian states:**

#### *a) India:*

China since its independence in 1949 has focused on keeping its neighbours as priority number one in its foreign policy making. Neighbourhood is very important as a state cannot get away with its geography. 'You can change friends but not neighbours'.<sup>26</sup> It focuses on having a friendly neighbourhood, so that it can focus on its economic programs. 'All over the history- whether during peace time or in conflict - China has usually placed its chief priority on relationship with its neighbours'.<sup>27</sup> Though China has sent mixed signals. With some states, it has extremely close and cordial

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<sup>23</sup> Harsh V Pant, "The Pakistan Thorn in China-US-India relations." *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2012): 83-95.

<sup>24</sup> Ahsan Gulrez, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relations." *The Army War College Review*, 2015: 1-15.

<sup>25</sup> Monika Chansoria, "China's arms sales to Pakistan unsettling South Asian security." *Indian Defense Review* 25, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi. "The Indo-US relations and India's engagement with its neighbors." *Daily Times*. August 24, 2020. [https://dailytimes.com.pk/658239/the-indo-us-relations-and-indias-engagement-with-its-neighbors/?fbclid=IwAR001Tzqjn8-XjWr\\_wpn2BbKjv4zCGCTZ8oSCfdG-9O9phPW2O8aTy\\_Mljs](https://dailytimes.com.pk/658239/the-indo-us-relations-and-indias-engagement-with-its-neighbors/?fbclid=IwAR001Tzqjn8-XjWr_wpn2BbKjv4zCGCTZ8oSCfdG-9O9phPW2O8aTy_Mljs).

<sup>27</sup> Robert A Scalapino, "China's Relations with Its Neighbors." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 38, no. 2 (1991): 63-74.



relations like Pakistan and with some it is just focusing in terms of business, for example, India.

China and India both are two big Asian powers, who have got a big share in world politics and economy. Discussions regarding Asian politics are incomplete without naming any of these two. India which has dominated the South Asian region and has always influences small states; China has proved to be a good substitute in this regard. 'Smaller states of South Asia are coming very closer to Beijing and view it as an option in comparison to single-handed dependence on New Delhi'.<sup>28</sup> This has proved to be true during Ladakh crisis between India and China in May 2020.

China and India had a good working relationship during early 1950s. Zhou En Lai along with Prime Minister Nehru delivered five principles of peaceful co-existence during the Bandung conference in 1955. 'Chinese premier wanted to seek dialogue on the ideological lines during Bandung conference in 1955 and wanted United in Asia'.<sup>29</sup> During this era, Sino-Indian relations were on a positive course and there was no sign of strategic partnership between Beijing and Islamabad. However, things turned upside down with the 1962 border skirmishes between India and China. 'The 1962 border skirmish was the climax of a bigger falling-out between New Delhi and Beijing which put a stop to the honeymoon of the *Chini-Hindi Bhai Bhai*, the brotherhood of China and India'.<sup>30</sup> This souring of relationship opened ways of China-Pakistan cordial relationship. 'The defining moment in China Pakistan connections which opened the doors to the 1965 war was due to Indo-China border skirmishes in 1962'.<sup>31</sup> Things went unexpectedly towards a down fall.

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<sup>28</sup> Talat Shabbir, "Rising China and its South Asian Neighbors: Evolving Dynamics and the Outlook." *Policy Perspectives* 14, no. 2 (2017): 137-152.

<sup>29</sup> Robert A Scalapino, "China's Relations with Its Neighbors." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 38, no. 2 (1991): 63-74.

<sup>30</sup> Ivan Lidarev, "History's Hostage: China, India and the War of 1962." *The Diplomat*. August 21, 2012. <https://thediplomat.com/2012/08/historys-hostage-china-india-and-the-war-of-1962/>.

<sup>31</sup> Klaus H Pringsheim, "China's Role in the Indo-Pakistani Conflict." *The China Quarterly*, 1965: 170-175.

Further incidents in 1967 between China and India as well as rift in Sino-Soviet relations in 1970s caused further bitterness in Chinese Indian connections. Beijing supported Pakistan during 1965 war. 'the new effect of Beijing stance during that situation seemed as one encouraging Pakistan to go forward and take Kashmir'.<sup>32</sup> Beijing diplomatically supported Islamabad as well and tried to exert pressure on India. 'Beijing predominantly played a significant part in backing up Islamabad in this critical stretch while calling Indian act as a "bare aggression." During that time Beijing used pressure to force the aggressive state i.e. India, for a truce'.<sup>33</sup> Though American support didn't reach Pakistan, it was China who took a hard stand for Pakistan.

During Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, Peking supported Pakistan. However, this support was not open as the one in 1965. It had multiple reasons. Beijing knew that part of things happening in East Pakistan was internal matter of Pakistan and China has always stuck with the policy of non-interference in internal affairs of states. Another important reason was Soviet support to India. China was already on back footing with USSR. It was avoiding further standoff. However, China criticized India regarding its interference in East Pakistan. 'Intrusion and subversive Indian activities in East Pakistan were panned on the basis of Beijing's faithfulness to the belief of non-interference into the matters of other states'.<sup>34</sup> This policy was used in support of Pakistan. However, one thing that cannot be denied regarding Chinese involvement in South Asian region is that it helped in creating a balance of power in the region. 'China is a state which has created balance of power in South Asia in order to maintain peace and security in the region'.<sup>35</sup> If there was no Chinese check on the region, India who has already received a lot of support from the United States, would have changed the power structure of South Asia. This power check on India is not just

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Quratulain Hafeez, "China's Role in 1965 Indo-Pak War." *Modern Diplomacy*. September 27, 2018. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/09/27/chinas-role-in-1965-indo-pak-war/>.

<sup>34</sup> Mehruunisa Ali, "China'S Diplomacy During The Indo-Pakistan War, 1971." *Pakistan Horizon*, 1972: 53-62.

<sup>35</sup> Imran Ali Noonari and Aslam Pervez Memon, "Pakistan-China Cooperation And Its Impact On South Asia." *The Government: Research Journal of Political Science* 5 (2017): 109-118.

for the benefit of Pakistan but also for China because while India confronts a powerful country in the shape of Pakistan, its defence will be divided into two paths, one for Pakistan and another for China and not just towards the latter. 'A powerful Pakistan antagonizes India with a two-front threat. It forces India to split its forces on the occasion of a war with China'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, a very important strategic aim of Beijing vis-a-vis South Asia is maintaining balance of power in the region.

During late 1980s China started focusing on trade and economic relationship with the world. It also started putting aside its disputes and issues with countries, India being one of them. China's trade rose with India. The Chinese products flooded the Indian markets generating billions of dollars earning for Chinese. After getting into trade ties with India, it somewhat softened its stance on Kashmir. 'In 1990s, Beijing tried to make its Kashmir policy towards New Delhi and Islamabad.... Chinese Minister Qichen during his visit to Dacca in 1994 referred to both the UN resolutions and Shimla agreement'.<sup>37</sup> India was contented with the reference of Shimla agreement in the Chinese statements. 'The termination of the Cold War demanded a Chinese reconsideration of India's strategic standing which resulted in Beijing's South Asia policies becoming more neutral'.<sup>38</sup> During the Kargil war of 1999, Beijing didn't support Pakistan as was expected by Pakistani military and political leadership. 'Islamabad tried to gain diplomatic and military support from Beijing. However, Beijing refused and as an alternative guided the Islamabad to pull out its intruders to avert additional escalation'.<sup>39</sup> China has always refrained from taking part in solving the regional issues as it has always believed in non-interference. 'In South Asian region, in spite of common boundaries and historic connections with both New Delhi and Islamabad, Beijing has played a negligible part in the

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<sup>36</sup> John W Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente." *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (1996): 323-347.

<sup>37</sup> Santosh Singh, "China's Kashmir Policy." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 16, no. 2 (2012): 100-113.

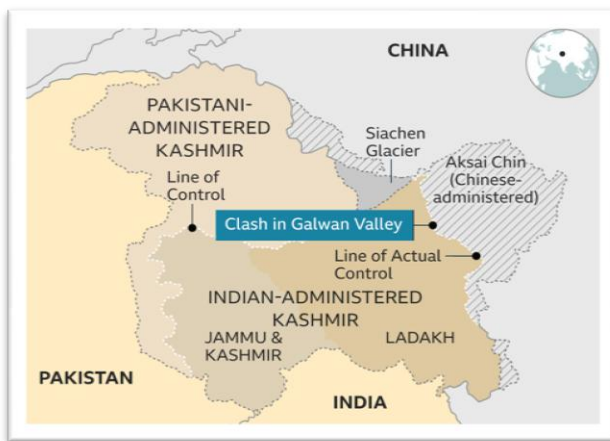
<sup>38</sup> Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland. *China And Crisis Management In South Asia*. 2018. <https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/InvestigatingCrisesChina.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Santosh Singh, "China's Kashmir Policy." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 16, no. 2 (2012): 100-113.

wars between them, instead leaving any third-party management mainly in the hands of the US and European powers'.<sup>40</sup> China's main focus has remained its economy all these years.

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China initiated its OBOR project and CPEC being its flagship in Pakistan is of immense importance to the former. Indian involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan especially in Baluchistan made Chinese project suffer in many ways. The arrest of Kalboshan Yadav is one of the examples of Indian involvement in Pakistan against the Chinese project. If ever there a situation arises where Beijing is forced to make a choice, it will be Pakistan. 'If forced to make a choice, Beijing will not sacrifice Islamabad'.<sup>41</sup> A paramount reason for this choice will not just be the friendship but massive investment in CPEC.

Sino-India relations went to its lowest in year 2020 due to the Ladakh incident. Beijing was not content with Indian plans in Ladakh and accused India of attacking its borders.



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53061476>

India sticks to the Line of Actual Control of 1962, while Chinese stick to the Line of Actual Control of 1959. Beijing believes that the

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<sup>40</sup> Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland. *China And Crisis Management In South Asia*. 2018. <https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/InvestigatingCrisesChina.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> John W Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente." *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (1996): 323-347.

territory between these two LACs was unjustly occupied by New Delhi between 1959 and 1962 and was the main reason for 1962 border skirmishes. Beijing is disgruntled with Indian motives in the Galwan valley. It considers Galwan valley as part of China. 'Beijing always owns sovereignty over the Galwan Valley'.<sup>42</sup> The standoff between both the countries has thawed. However, through this incident Beijing clearly conveyed to New Delhi that the former will not tolerate India's aggressive designs in the area.

*b) Afghanistan:*

Afghanistan represents a mix value for Chinese. Though the unexplored minerals, linkage with Central Asia as well as strategic location makes it very attractive for Beijing. However, the support of Uighur separatist from Afghanistan has also remained a point of concern for China.

Diplomatic relationship between Kabul and Beijing started in mid 1950s. The connections between both the neighbours remained peaceful but mostly unengaged. Beijing was occupied with its focus towards domestic economic policies and rivalry towards the capitalist west. 'Afghanistan was not an important consideration for Chinese foreign policy, which was consumed with the Soviet and American threats'.<sup>43</sup> However, exchange of visits occurred between King Zahir Shah and Mao Zedong. After disposing monarchy, the PDPA took power in Kabul. It was widely believed to be pro-soviet. During this era, Sino-Soviet relations were on a downfall. Beijing was not happy with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on the request of President Karmal. Meanwhile Afghan government criticized Chinese involvement in Vietnam. This made Beijing to call off diplomatic relationship between both the countries.

After the Taliban took power in Kabul in 1990s, China was not content with them. The chief reason was Taliban support for Separatist movements in Uyghur. They were the one that backed

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<sup>42</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on June 17, 2020. June 17, 2020.

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1789509.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1789509.shtml).

<sup>43</sup> Jae H Ku, Drew Thompson, and Daniel Wertz. *The U.S.-China Relationship and Afghanistan*. US-Korea Institute at SAIS (2011), 2011.

UN resolutions against Taliban initially. 'In the beginning, China was concerned about Taliban.... ties to anti-Chinese terrorist group, East Turkestan Islamic Movement. Beijing supported UN sanctions against Taliban'.<sup>44</sup> However, after realizing the importance of restoring diplomatic ties with Kabul, Beijing changed its stance. They started flights between China and Kabul as well as started economic ties. This was beneficial not just for Beijing but also carried recognition and support for Taliban regime.

The devastating event of 9/11 changed the global political dynamics. Afghanistan was attacked by NATO and US forces. China, however, didn't participate in any such attack and didn't send its troops for attacking Taliban. 'Beijing remains resolute that they will not make any commitments to ISAF or send war troops to Afghanistan, in spite of Beijing's vested interest in Afghanistan's long-standing stability'.<sup>45</sup> Kabul currently is in a bad shape economically. 'Afghanistan has \$11 billion in public expenditure each year, which is a far less than its revenues of \$2.5 billion'.<sup>46</sup> In this situation, Beijing seems the best fit to help Afghanistan to explore its minerals and resources. 'Beijing has sufficient capital to invest in Kabul's infrastructure and natural resources sectors'.<sup>47</sup> This will not just earn praise for Beijing, but Pakistan will also get benefited by it. Strong Chinese hold on Afghan economy as well as in its political arena will assist Pakistan in many ways. After the US announced its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, Beijing got concerns regarding unstable Afghanistan. Instability in Afghanistan has a direct impact on China. 'The jeopardy of terrorist violence gushing out of Afghanistan stimulated China to involve more intensely with in Afghan affairs'.<sup>48</sup> This pushed Beijing to get

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<sup>44</sup> Rupert Stone, *The odd couple: China's deepening relationship with the Taliban*. August 2, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Jae H Ku, Drew Thompson, and Daniel Wertz. *The U.S.-China Relationship and Afghanistan*. US-Korea Institute at SAIS (2011), 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Mujib Mashal. "Afghanistan Needs Billions in Aid Even After a Peace Deal, World Bank Says." *The New York Times*. December 5, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/world/asia/afghanistan-aid-world-bank.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Jae H Ku, Drew Thompson, and Daniel Wertz. *The U.S.-China Relationship and Afghanistan*. US-Korea Institute at SAIS (2011), 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Rupert Stone, *The odd couple: China's deepening relationship with the Taliban*. August 2, 2019.

involved with Taliban, the US and Pakistan in peace talks in 2015. This is known as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group. China continued these talks with Taliban and is in a better position to negotiate with Taliban and the Afghan government. No doubt China has vested economic interests in Afghanistan, but its major concern is to stop the spread of terrorism which is threatening Chinese stability. 'to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a strong base for Uyghur militancy'.<sup>49</sup> A stable Afghanistan can prove to be advantageous for the whole region including China and Pakistan.

## Conclusion

Sino-Pak associations prove to be time tested. Both countries have supported each other. Beijing, despite its high-level economic ties with India, has kept the stance of UN resolution in resolving Kashmir issue. It has supported Pakistan during its wars with India. Its joint ventures with Pakistan especially in the defence sector are of immense importance.

With Pakistan's support it is conducting peace talks with Taliban, which will prove to be valued for both the partners. Pakistan wants more Chinese involvement in Afghanistan to sideline India. Recent border skirmishes between China and India shows that though both these neighbours have strong trade relations, however their unresolved border issues can further enhance their hostilities.

Both Islamabad and Beijing have adhered to four working principles of strategic partnership. Therefore, focusing on their primary priorities, good communication and transparency, mutual goals and ability to defuse tensions. Due to understanding from both the sides, Beijing and Islamabad are ready to get paybacks from joint ventures like CPEC. Though, there are challenges faced by both the countries but handling these challenges has made this association stronger and more viable.

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<sup>49</sup> Dirk van der Kley, "China's foreign policy in Afghanistan." *Lowy Institute for International Policy*. October 2014.  
[https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/chinas-foreign-policy-in-afghanistan\\_0.pdf](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/chinas-foreign-policy-in-afghanistan_0.pdf).

## Chapter No. 4

# Rising Tensions Between China and India: Implications for Pakistan

Dr. Inayat Kalim\* and Ms. Sadaf Khalid \*\*

### Abstract

This study demonstrates that how the ongoing border crisis between China and India may affect Pakistan. So far, all the parties involved in this crisis have reasons to avoid a full-blown conflict because of the trouble it entails for them. If both India and China revert back to what the status quo was before the stand-off, it might not be in the best interests of Pakistan. This probably means that India will continue to build roads which in all likelihood are what gave rise to the present tensions between India and China. The unchecked construction of these roads is a concern not just for China but for Pakistan as well since any escalation would have a fall-out on Pakistan. With India in a sticky situation, it is easy for Pakistan to be overly confident about its position in South Asia. Indian rhetoric has not been received well around the world and this is a diplomatic victory for Pakistan in terms of its foreign policy. The entire scenario provides a golden chance to Pakistan where they can highlight Indian atrocities in Occupied Kashmir. A growing strategic relationship between India and the US will certainly raise alarm bells in Pakistan. It has taken a lot of time and effort on the part of Pakistan to ameliorate its own relationship with the Americans. This could possibly be in jeopardy, if the Americans choose to take sides in case of escalating tensions with China.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, China, India, Sino-Indian Rivalry, Regional Stability.

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## Introduction

In June 2020 the armies of the two most populous nations, China and India, came face to face in a tense stand-off in the Galwan Valley of Ladakh Region. It is an area which is disputed due to poorly demarcated borders along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) because of which both sides have been engaged in a long-term conflict. The current situation in the area has further aggravated the geopolitical friction between the two states.<sup>1</sup> To comprehend the politics behind this conflict it is important to understand the historical aspect of the current situation.

The two countries share approximately 3400 kilometres of border which has resulted in many territorial disputes.<sup>2</sup> Border patrols from both sides often get embroiled in fights and brawls, however, over the course of four decades they had been successful in avoiding armed confrontation until the night of June 15, 2020. The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the border separating these two Asian giants<sup>3</sup> and due to its poor demarcation, armies from China and India have confronted each other multiple times. The mountainous Himalayan region consists of snow-capped peaks, rivers and lakes which mean that sometimes the line dividing the two sides can be blurred and confusing. Karakoram mountains, which are at the centre of this current conflict comprise of untapped resources, home to the world's highest landing strip and glaciers which are integral in supporting irrigation systems of nearby regions. The mountain range also offers a very crucial connection to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Although this conflict began at three different locations in April 2020, by June it had expanded to other areas as well such as Depsang and Galwan Valley which are

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<sup>1</sup> Anbarasan Ethirajan and Vikas Pandey, "China-India border: Why tensions are rising between the neighbours," *BBC News*, May 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52852509>; Alyssa Ayres, "The China-India Border Dispute," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/china-india-border-dispute-what-know>.

<sup>2</sup> "India-China Border Dispute Explained in 400 Words," *BBC News*, September 10, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53062484>.

<sup>3</sup> "India-China Border Dispute Explained in 400 Words."

part of the disputed Aksai Chin region of Kashmir.<sup>4</sup> This conflict got people's attention because of the deadly fight which took place between the Indian and Chinese troops on June 15, 2020. The clash left more than 15 Indian soldiers dead; however, Chinese authorities did not announce any fatalities in their ranks.<sup>5</sup>

Indian and Chinese troops have been in conflict for months now with both sides blaming each other for breaching the border. The ongoing hostilities are the most serious in almost fifty years provoking political and military tension between the two countries. Indian and Chinese armies have vowed to protect their respective territories but back door diplomacy to end this stand-off is also underway.<sup>6</sup> This conflict has very quickly changed the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between India and China. The last time these two countries faced each other was way back in 1962 when they fought a war over territorial issues.<sup>7</sup> The Indians were defeated in that war and since then this border dispute has remained a bone of contention between these two giants.

Ladakh is not the only region at the centre of the current conflict between India and China. They are also at loggerheads with each other in Nathu La which is a mountain pass joining China with Indian State of Sikkim in the North-East.<sup>8</sup> Despite the border skirmishes, China still remains one of India's most significant trading partners. Ignoring this reality, the Indian government has

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<sup>4</sup> "Tension as India, China Accuse Each Other of Border Violations," *Al Jazeera*, August 31, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/31/tension-as-india-china-accuse-each-other-of-border-violations>.

<sup>5</sup> "Army Says 20 Indian Soldiers Killed in Ladakh Clash with Chinese Troops, 'Both Sides Now Disengaged'," *The Wire*, June 16, 2020, <https://thewire.in/security/indian-army-officers-killed-china-galwan-valley>.

<sup>6</sup> Giancarlo E. Valori, "India and China in the Clash for Ladakh," *Modern Diplomacy*, July 11, 2020, <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/07/11/india-and-china-in-the-clash-for-ladakh/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Tension as India, China Accuse Each Other of Border Violations," *Al Jazeera*, August 31, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/31/tension-as-india-china-accuse-each-other-of-border-violations>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Rowand, "The Bloody China-India Border Fight Is a Lot Like the Last One," *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/18/china-india-1967-nathu-la-war/>.

imposed a ban on more than 60 Chinese applications including the very popular app, Tik Tok, citing security concerns.<sup>9</sup>

The Ladakh stand-off has gained substantial attention in neighbouring Pakistan as any escalation in Sino-Indo stand-off happens, it will be difficult for Pakistan to remain disengaged. China being Pakistan's most reliable ally so far, as well as Pakistan's own territorial disputes with India will probably play a major role in Pakistan siding with the Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

For Pakistan, these latest turns of events are extremely significant in nature and that is mainly due to the sort of association it shares with both India and China. India is Pakistan's traditional nemesis whereas China is referred to as Pakistan's "iron brother". So naturally in a conflict between these two countries there would be serious implications for Pakistan if it gets fully involved or acts as a silent spectator in the background. And this is what the chapter attempts to explore: how will this rising tension between India and China affect Pakistan.

### Issue of Kashmir

According to President Sardar Masood Khan of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the India-China face-off in the Ladakh region was another dimension to the issue of Kashmir:<sup>11</sup> a dispute which was left unaddressed by the British when they left South Asia in 1947.<sup>12</sup> The root cause of all the animosity between India and Pakistan stems from the unresolved dispute of Kashmir. However, there are some parts of Kashmir which are administered by China and these include some areas of Ladakh Region. Hence, the convergence of

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<sup>9</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, "India Bans Nearly 60 Chinese Apps, Including TikTok and WeChat." *The New York Times*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/29/world/asia/tik-tok-banned-india-china.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad A. Notezai, "What Does the China-India Standoff in Ladakh Mean for Pakistan?" *The Diplomat*, June 24, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/what-does-the-china-india-standoff-in-ladakh-mean-for-pakistan/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Eduardo Baptista, "Why Pakistan is a Big Factor in China's Border Clashes with India," *South China Morning Post*, June 27, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3090758/why-pakistan-big-factor-chinas-border-clashes-india>.

territories in Ladakh has brought these Asian giants in a deadly stand-off regarding Kashmir.<sup>13</sup>

Kashmir has been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan ever since the two countries got their independence from the British but now it is souring India's ties with China as well.<sup>14</sup> As per the Indian stance, the whole region of Kashmir belongs to them and they do not want any third party intervening in this conflict, not even their superpower ally, the United States. On the other hand, Pakistan stands by Kashmir being a disputed territory. The India-China stand-off has now given more credibility to Pakistan's claim of the disputed territorial status of Kashmir. The Pakistani government is constantly encouraging the United Nations and the United States to mediate in order to resolve the Kashmiri issue in a peaceful manner.

In August 2019 India annexed the disputed territory of Kashmir.<sup>15</sup> Many analysts are of the view that this move by India has actually exacerbated the already prevailing tensions with China which eventually resulted in the deadly clash in 2020. The Chinese viewed this annexation as a unilateral move which is a threat to their territorial integrity.<sup>16</sup> They even condemned India's actions at the United Nations. With China's support, Pakistan has raised the issue of Kashmir on every global platform. Especially since China's interests are now very closely linked with the issue of Kashmir as well after the heightened tensions with India.

### **The United States Factor**

US and China have an extremely complex relationship.<sup>17</sup> Although they are heavily dependent on one another economically they still

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<sup>13</sup> Muhammad A. Notezai, "What Does the China-India Standoff in Ladakh Mean for Pakistan?"

<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Baptista, "Why Pakistan is a Big Factor in China's Border Clashes with India."

<sup>15</sup> "India-China Border Talks: Four Things You Should Know," *Al Jazeera*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/20/india-china-border-talks-four-things-you-should-know>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "A Relationship Under Extreme Duress: U.S.-China Relations at a Crossroads," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 16,

remain each other's biggest international rivals.<sup>18</sup> Through India and China's stand-off in Ladakh, the Americans got a chance to undermine China by siding with India. This stand-off underscores the significance of the US-India alliance. Just before her retirement, former Ambassador Alice Wells criticized that China was initiating the fight with Indian troops in Ladakh. She even linked China's provocations with its territorial conflicts in the South China Sea.<sup>19</sup> A statement was also issued by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that the United States strongly condemns the "aggression" shown by Chinese troops on the Line of Actual Control.<sup>20</sup> United States intervention on this issue highlights the rivalry between the US and China and proves that US will go to any length to safeguard its calculated association with India. Both countries feel uncomfortable seeing the rise of China as the world's sole economic and military superpower: a position that the US has enjoyed since the WWII. Which is why the possibility of the US secretly helping out India cannot be ruled out? During the last Indo-China conflict on the Doklam Plateau back in 2017, the Indian forces were provided with intelligence from the US.<sup>21</sup>

A strong US-India alliance is certainly not in the interest of Pakistan especially at a time when Pakistan is trying to make an effort to improve its partnership with the US by bringing the American negotiators and the Afghan Taliban to a common platform so that a peace deal can be sorted out in Afghanistan. Pakistan cannot afford to sour its relationship with the US right now if seen from the perspective of the Afghan Peace Deal. China and India's border stand-off and the American reaction to it have clarified for Pakistan how hard it will be to please them. In the

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2019; "Timeline: U.S. Relations with China 1949–2020," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 23, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> C. H. Tung, "America and China Need Each Other," *The Diplomat*, February 8, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/america-and-china-need-each-other/>.

<sup>19</sup> Derek Grossman, "Chinese Border Aggression Against India Likely Unrelated to Pandemic," *RAND Corporation*, July 6, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Rajeswari P. Rajagopalan, "This Time the US Is Taking India's Side Against China," *The Diplomat*, July 23, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/this-time-the-us-is-taking-indias-side-against-china/>.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Kugelman, "The Pakistan Factor in the India-China Standoff," *The National Interest*, June 6, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/pakistan-factor-india-china-standoff-161021?page=0%2C1>.

Ladakh conflict, Pakistan has sided with China owing to the nature of its relationship. The stand-off is a reminder that it will be difficult to build stronger ties with the Americans because Pakistan is supporting their main strategic adversary who President Trump also views as a national security threat.

### **India's Face-saving: Taking Action Against Pakistan**

As a result of the deadly showdown with Chinese troops in June 2020, 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives.<sup>22</sup> This whole incident was a real embarrassment for the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who will want to restore his strongman image. Lately the Indian government and the army have faced a backlash from their own people. What better policy than to shift the attention of patriotic Indians and show aggression towards their traditional enemy, Pakistan. The Indian government will try to take action against Pakistan so that they can win back the hearts of their loyal Hindu voters.<sup>23</sup> India's lack of response after 20 of their soldiers were killed in the Ladakh skirmish has raised questions about their reputation as a potential rival to China.

In the aftermath of the Ladakh conflict, India has tried to rekindle a diplomatic relationship with China.<sup>24</sup> This just goes to show that Indian priority is still a stable alliance with China as compared to having a full partnership with the US. Considering the fact that the balance of power has shifted in favour of China, the Indian government and military will create other situations where they can showcase the might and proficiency of their Armed Forces. If diplomatic policies are driven by the potential of militaries then aggressive action between Indian and Pakistani forces will be a definite strategy for India to cover up for their weaknesses and shortfalls against China.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Basma Khalil, "China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response," *Modern Diplomacy*, June 16, 2020

<sup>23</sup> Pravin Sawhney, "Here's Why All's Not Well for India on the Ladakh Front," *The Wire*, June 10, 2020

<sup>24</sup> M. B. Lakhani, "Kashmir's Role in Boiling China-India Tensions," *The Express Tribune*, June 28, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2251770/kashmirs-role-boiling-china-india-tensions>

<sup>25</sup> Basma Khalil, "China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response," *Modern Diplomacy*, June 16, 2020

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 on the back of a nationalistic campaign in which promises were made about "India First".<sup>26</sup> This narrative really resonated with the hardcore Hindus of India who believe that their country only belongs to the majority Hindus. Since 2014, Prime Minister Modi has been unable to deliver on the promises he made to his people regarding economic growth. During his regime, India's GDP growth has fallen to a new low in 11 years.<sup>27</sup> To restore his image in the eyes of already downtrodden people, Modi has resorted to playing with their patriotic emotions by annexing Kashmir in August 2019 and giving permission to build a Hindu temple on a site where the historical Babri Masjid once stood.

According to many researchers, leaders who try to divert people's attention usually focus on attacking their traditional enemies which would get them the support of their people. Since the conflict in Ladakh, politicians in India are really trying to keep Pakistan in the consciousness of their people. Indians have made their ambitions regarding "Greater Kashmir" very clear.<sup>28</sup> Greater Kashmir also includes Pakistan's province of Gilgit-Baltistan. As per a statement by India's new Army Chief, India is more than capable of fighting a conventional war against Pakistan and gaining control of "Pakistani Occupied Kashmir". Qualifying his statement with the claim that if allowed by their government, the Indian Army can effortlessly defeat the Pakistanis in just seven or ten days. India's Defence Minister has also said that taking back the Pakistani side of Kashmir has become a core objective for India's Parliament.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jason Burke, "Narendra Modi's Landslide Victory Shatters Congress's Grip on India," *The Guardian*, May 16, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/16/narendra-modi-victory-congress-india-election>.

<sup>27</sup> Fahd Humayun, "After India's Skirmish with China, Is Pakistan Next?" *Foreign Policy*, June 29, 2020

<sup>28</sup> Hilal Mir, "How India Silenced Kashmir's Leading Newspaper Columnists," *TRT World*, January 7, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-india-silenced-kashmir-s-leading-newspaper-columnists-32765>.

<sup>29</sup> Shekhar Gupta, "How Indian Armed Forces Can Defeat Pakistan in Less Than a Week," *The Print*, February 1, 2020

Although tension on Indo-China border have considerably cooled down but memories of a tense confrontation between India and Pakistan back in February 2019 remains fresh in the minds of people on both sides of the border.<sup>30</sup> In that tense period it was all about a battle of narratives between the two sides. While Indians claimed that they had successfully destroyed a Pakistani F-16, their Pakistani counterparts rejected this account and reiterated that it was in fact Pakistan which not only had downed an Indian Mig-21 Bison but also captured an Indian pilot who was later returned to his country.<sup>31</sup> This incident took place right before a very crucial election for Prime Minister Modi. It consolidated his position as a patriotic and nationalist strongman and as a consequence of which Modi won a landslide victory in April 2019.<sup>32</sup> So, the point remains that because India's shortcomings in front of China have put a dent in the popularity of Modi, he will probably plan some sort of action against Pakistan which could redeem him in front of his own people.

With back-to-back regional crises under Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the costs are increasing for India's leaders. The face-off with China was a wakeup call for the Indian opposition who very quickly condemned the BJP for surrendering completely in response to the Ladakh debacle and not taking decisive action against the Chinese. For this reason, a small-scale fight with Pakistan where India can display their military might would be extremely useful for the media which is controlled by the BJP.<sup>33</sup> After the attack on a military convoy in Indian Occupied Kashmir in early 2019, which resulted in the deaths of 40 Indian soldiers, Modi's campaign was heavily covered by the media even though

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Safi and Azhar Farooq, "Standoff in Kashmir: 'Our Last Hope is That a War Will Sort This Once and for All'," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/02/kashmir-india-pakistan-stand-off-war-border>.

<sup>31</sup> Sameer Lalwani and Emily Tallo, "Did India shoot down a Pakistani F-16 in February? This just became a big deal," *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2019; "US Refuses to Confirm If Indian Mig 21 Shot-Down Pakistani F-16 Fighter Jet," *EurAsian Times: Latest Asian, Middle-East, EurAsian, Indian News*, April 29, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Katharine Adeney, "India Election: How Narendra Modi Won with an Even Bigger Majority," *The Conversation*, May 23, 2019

<sup>33</sup> Fahd Humayun, "After India's Skirmish with China, Is Pakistan Next?"



the opposition had very energetic campaigns as well.<sup>34</sup> Trying to initiate another conflict with Pakistan will give a chance to the BJP to regain the support of their nationalist Hindu voters and cover up the stories coming out from their own camp regarding discord in the upper ranks of the BJP.

### **Security of CPEC: A Concern for Both Pakistan and China**

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi - billion flag ship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has always been looked at with great suspicion by our Indian neighbour.<sup>35</sup> To them it is not a way to alleviate poverty in the region and bring relief to the millions of people trapped in continuous circular debt; the Indians believe that it is a pressure tactic by two of its most hostile neighbours- China and Pakistan - to increase their own influence in the region especially Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan which India claims as its own territory. The US is also a party to this narrative as it feels uncomfortable in terms of the political and economic benefits of CPEC and its conflictual relationship with China.<sup>36</sup> India and the US are trying to do their utmost to disrupt the initiative by China. Indian construction activity in its part of occupied and disputed territory of Kashmir and Ladakh has resulted in border clashes between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LOC) and deadly clashes between China and India along the Line of Actual Control in the Ladakh region. The situation in the region is volatile to say the least.

The illegal and unauthorized construction activities by India along the border region are proving to be a security threat to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) due to the close proximity of CPEC's own road network and other infrastructure which are China's greatest concerns at the moment.<sup>37</sup> The status quo in the Ladakh region had been maintained for years by India and China, and although hostile to each other both countries and their soldiers deployed along the border had maintained an uneasy truce. However, since the beginning of CPEC developmental activities in

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad A. Notezai, "What Does the China-India Standoff in Ladakh Mean for Pakistan?" *The Diplomat*, June 24, 2020

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Basma Khalil, "China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response."

China and Pakistan, there was a visible counter move by India and they started constructing a feeder road connecting a road network built earlier from Darbuk-Shyok in Galwan Valley to Daulat Begh-Oldi.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese were visibly unhappy as this road strategically connects Leh to the Daulat Begh-Oldi military airbase which would allow quick and efficient movement of troops and equipment to the LAC.<sup>39</sup>

After the completion of this road, India would be able to control the Galwan Valley ridgeline where the clashes took place between India and China.<sup>40</sup> This control would also enable India access to Aksai-Chin (an area occupied by China after the 1962 War), which holds the Tibet-Xinjiang highway.<sup>41</sup> West of Daulat Begh-Oldi is Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan and part of CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor).<sup>42</sup> China is naturally apprehensive as it sees all these moves by India as a way of undermining the impact of CPEC and compromising its security especially in the region of Xinjiang. This could have a disastrous impact on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's socio-economic and political stability.

The August 5, 2019 change in the Article 370 of the Indian constitution changed the status quo of Jammu and Kashmir autonomous region converting it into two union territories paving way for direct rule from New Delhi. This change also enables people from other union territories in India to buy property and land in both regions which would successfully change the demographics of the area.<sup>43</sup> Although Pakistan brought the Indian atrocities to the international stage, it could not muster enough support for its narrative as it was generally believed that it was

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<sup>38</sup> Dhritiman Banerjee, "Analyzing the 2020 India-China Standoff," *Modern Diplomacy*, July 24, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/07/24/analyzing-the-2020-india-china-standoff/>.

<sup>39</sup> Derek Grossman, "Chinese Border Aggression Against India Likely Unrelated to Pandemic."

<sup>40</sup> Banerjee, "Analyzing the 2020 India-China Standoff."

<sup>41</sup> Eduardo Baptista, "Why Pakistan is a Big Factor in China's Border Clashes with India."

<sup>42</sup> Dhritiman Banerjee, "Analyzing the 2020 India-China Standoff."

<sup>43</sup> Amit Wanchoo, "The India-China Conflict: Covid-19 and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Asia Global Online Journal* - University of Hong Kong, July 8, 2020, <https://www.asiaglobalonline.hku.hk/india-china-conflict-covid-19-and-china-pakistan-economic-corridor>.

Indian prerogative to make any kinds of changes in its constitution. On the other hand, both Pakistan and China realize the necessity to secure the Gilgit-Baltistan region so that the CPEC projects can be operated smoothly.<sup>44</sup> This is the same region that India claims as its own.<sup>45</sup>

The future does not hold any promises and the road ahead for the three neighbours is rocky indeed. It is quite possible that any future dispute between Pakistan and India could turn into an all-out war with devastating consequences for the region. The China and India border dispute may also go on for a long time unless Russia comes forth and brokers some form of peace.<sup>46</sup> In an ideal scenario, India and Pakistan continue to respect each other's current stance and give CPEC a chance to evolve and succeed and maybe in future India may benefit from it as well. Hence, China would then ensure that its border disputes with India in the Ladakh region would never escalate.

### **Pakistan's Core Foreign Policy Goal: Undermining India's Influence**

In this whole scenario, it was logical for Pakistan to react in favour of China. Since China is Pakistan's ally state it was obvious that they will support China. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi also issued a statement in which he said that China should take notice of India's unauthorized construction of roads in Ladakh.<sup>47</sup> He went even further and warned about India's role in creating regional friction which could put the security of South Asia in great jeopardy. India has border disputes not just with Pakistan

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<sup>44</sup> Amit Wanchoo, "The India-China Conflict: Covid-19 and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor."

<sup>45</sup> N. K. Bhatia, "India Ratcheting Up Claims over PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan Not Without basis," *The Financial Express*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-ratcheting-up-claims-over-pok-and-gilgit-baltistan-not-without-basis/1963895/>.

<sup>46</sup> Artyom Lukin, "How Russia Emerged as Key Mediator in the China-India Dispute," *East Asia Forum* - Far Eastern Federal University, October 22, 2020, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/10/23/how-russia-emerged-as-key-mediator-in-the-china-india-dispute/>.

<sup>47</sup> Basma Khalil, "China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response."

and China, but with Nepal as well.<sup>48</sup> Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan also criticized the expansionist policies of Modi which he said were a threat to India's neighbours.<sup>49</sup> There are attempts on the part of the Pakistani leadership to make the international community aware about India's aggressive behaviour.

## Conclusion

How the ongoing border crisis between China and India may affect Pakistan remains to be seen. So far, all the parties involved in this crisis have reasons to avoid a full-blown conflict because of the trouble it entails for them. If both India and China revert back to what the status quo was before the stand-off, it might not be in the best interests of Pakistan. This probably means that India will continue to build roads which in all likelihood are what gave rise to the present tensions between India and China.<sup>50</sup> The unchecked construction of these roads is a concern not just for China but for Pakistan as well since any escalation would have a fall-out on Pakistan.<sup>51</sup> With India in a sticky situation, it is easy for Pakistan to be overly confident about its position in South Asia. Indian rhetoric has not been received well around the world and this is a diplomatic victory for Pakistan in terms of its foreign policy. The entire scenario provides a golden chance to Pakistan where they can highlight Indian atrocities in Occupied Kashmir. A growing strategic relationship between India and the US will certainly raise alarm bells in Pakistan. It has taken a lot of time and effort on the part of Pakistan to ameliorate their own relationship with the Americans. This could possibly be in jeopardy, if the Americans choose to take sides in case of escalating tensions with China.

Until India and China find a way to overcome their reciprocal mistrust of each other's intentions, it will be complicated for either party to get out of this conflict unscathed while also keeping a

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<sup>48</sup> Dakshina Murthy, "India on Edge as It Grapples with a Twin Dispute on Its Borders," *TRT World*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/india-on-edge-as-it-grapples-with-a-twin-dispute-on-its-borders-37358>.

<sup>49</sup> Basma Khalil, "China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response."

<sup>50</sup> Kugelman, "The Pakistan Factor in the India-China Standoff."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

pretence of their power.<sup>52</sup> In terms of Pakistani interests, this stand-off is of great geostrategic importance. One of Pakistan's main goals pertaining to their foreign policy in the region is to undermine India's interests<sup>53</sup>. If India is kept engaged by China, it means they would not be able to assert their dominance in Indian Occupied Kashmir because they will be too preoccupied with China in Ladakh. In that scenario Pakistan will probably get involved due to their association with China and that will not turn out to be a great situation for any of the parties involved. "Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake". This quote by Napoleon Bonaparte perfectly explains how Pakistan should further react to the ongoing political tension between India and China.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ayesha Siddiqua, "Why Pakistan is Keeping Mum About India-China LAC Conflict," *The Print*, July 4, 2020, <https://theprint.in/opinion/why-pakistan-is-keeping-mum-about-india-china-lac-conflict/454034/>.

<sup>53</sup> Ayesha Siddiqua, "Why Pakistan is Keeping Mum About India-China LAC Conflict."

<sup>54</sup> Lakhani, "Kashmir's Role in Boiling China-India Tensions."

## Chapter No. 5

# India-Sri Lanka Relations: Politics of Ports and Stability in Indian Ocean

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### Abstract

This chapter intends to analyse India-Sri Lanka relations with special reference to Politics of Ports and Stability in the Indian Ocean. In order to evaluate bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka, it will briefly discuss geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean, which plays an important role in shaping the contours of the contemporary and historical relations between both countries since their independence from the British Raj. The sea-based trade was monopolized by few powerful nations that had attained control of seas and oceans, geopolitical theories evolved highlighting the importance and significance of different oceans and which were categorized accordingly. The chapter concluded that India-China political and commercial competition in Sri Lanka is likely to intensify. India certainly has the advantage of geographic proximity and historical ties, in addition to her greater influence over Tamils. However, China has even greater advantage of her soft power manifestation backed by more financial resources and technological superiority.

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, India, Blue Economy, Maritime Power, Indian Ocean.

### Introduction

Oceans and ports have always been important in human life for maritime travel and trade. With the advent of steam powered ships, the significance of oceans multiplied manifold. Not only the oceans became an open route for large scale commerce and trade, it eventually paved the way for colonization of large parts

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of the world by more powerful states, which had industrialized and were looking for cheap natural resources and captive markets for their surplus products. Simultaneously, protection of shipping lanes and safety of trade ships led to developments of armed ships and growth of naval forces. Creation of more lethal weapon bearing platforms at water enhanced the competition of mastery at seas and oceans. All these factors led to greater geo-economic, geopolitical and geostrategic (security) significance of oceans and seas.

Over the many centuries, empires have competed for control of seas and oceans to increase their influence in the world and to compete with their rival powers. The empires that developed more maritime forces and ports and had acquired control of more ports beyond their territories grew both economically and militarily. Acquisition of ports and trading rights and privileges led to intra-empire rivalries, which turned into imperial wars in different regions of the world. Since many littoral areas were weak to defend themselves, these were colonized by more powerful nations. Capturing of ports led to conquest of large tracts of hinterland that gave unchecked access to enormous natural resources and control over large number of human resources to the colonizer. The colonial trade not only flourished due to availability of cheap raw martial and large consumer market, it also paved the way for slave trade in which human being were captured and traded like animals.

Since the sea-based trade was monopolized by few powerful nations that had attained control of seas and oceans, geopolitical theories evolved highlighting the importance and significance of different oceans and which were categorized accordingly. Many ports and islands, which were located on the sea trade lanes naturally became more important than others. With the advent of naval warfare in modern era, all ports which provided logistic support to commercial and warships gained more importance.

Sri Lanka occupies a unique geostrategic advantage due its location in the middle of Indian Ocean and close to important sea lanes of communications (SLOCS). Due to her location, Sri Lanka has remained attractive to global maritime powers for last many centuries. Portuguese occupied Ceylon

(present day Sri Lanka) from beginning of sixteenth century (1505 AD) till mid-seventeenth century (1658 AD). Their occupation primarily remained focused on coastal areas, in order to promote their commerce and trade. Dutch replaced the Portuguese and ruled Sri Lanka till 1796 AD and the British occupied Sri Lanka in 1815 and ruled till 1948. All these colonizers basically took advantages of the geostrategic location of different ports of Sri Lanka to advance and promote their global trade. However, British occupation was more entrenched, occupying heartland territories of the Island as compared to earlier colonizers whose occupation mainly focused on the coastal areas and different ports on eastern and western coasts. British occupation of Sri Lanka also played a very important role in the occupation of India and consolidation of their colonial control over the sub-continent, besides facilitating British commercial and military activities in the Far East and China.

After her independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has tried to maintain neutrality being dragged into their zone of influence by various global powers. Sri Lanka, nevertheless, had to compromise to an extent, to take advantages of her geographic location or to accept regional and global pressure though as an active member of Non-Aligned Movement. During contemporary times, the United States, the United Kingdom, and India have managed to seek some privileges to build and use Sri Lankan ports, especially the Colombo and Trincomalee Ports. India and Japan have tried to build and expand some terminal facility at Colombo Port, whereas similar interest has been shown to develop Trincomalee Port as well. In order to meet her current and future maritime needs, China has also built a port at Sri Lanka's southern tip at Hambantota which overlooks international SLOCs from a closer distance. The operational control of Hambantota Port has been handed over to Chinese port management company for 99 years against financial assistance of more than US \$ one billion provided by China to Sri Lanka. The Chinese assistance has been termed as 'Debt Trap' by US and Indian diplomats and scholars, though Sri Lankan Government has clearly denied it.

This chapter intends to analyse 'India-Sri Lanka Relations' with special reference to 'Politics of Ports and Stability in Indian Ocean'.



In order to evaluate bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka, I will briefly discuss geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean, which plays an important role in shaping the contours of contemporary and historical relations between both countries since their independence from the British Raj. Sri Lanka's quest for safeguarding her geographic integrity, national cohesion, and national security, aspiration for economic progress, and legitimate desire for reasonable neutrality within the bound of pragmatism, have been guiding principles for her foreign relations with her neighbouring countries in the region and, with global powers. Various agreements for building ports and port-related facilities and terms and conditions their utilization, without compromising her sovereignty have always remained priority issues for all governments in Sri Lanka, notwithstanding their political inclinations. Hence, despite different approaches adopted by changing governments, taking advantages of her geostrategic location and protecting the national interest have always remained supreme.

### **Strategic Significance of Indian Ocean**

Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world with a water area of around 73.5 million square kilometres.<sup>1</sup> It is dominated by two vast bays, the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, covering nearly 20% of earth's water expanse<sup>2</sup> and borders three continents. It is the most strategic waterway comprising 30 littoral and 11 landlocked states with 1,284 islands.<sup>3</sup> According to some writers, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) comprises of forty eight countries including the littoral and island states.<sup>4</sup> Indian Ocean, in contrast to Atlantic and Pacific oceans, which are 'open oceans' can be accessed through

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<sup>1</sup> Importance of Indian Ocean Region and Sri Lanka, <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/importance-of-indian-ocean-region-and-sri-lanka-history-essay.php>, October 18, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Rasul B. Rais, *The Indian Ocean and The Super Powers* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 33. Cited by Khan Hasham Bin Saddique, in *Indian Ocean: Indo China Rivalry and Implications for Pakistan* (M.Phil. Thesis), Faculty of Security Studies, *National Defence University* (Islamabad: 2012-2013), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Khan Hasham Bin Saddique, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Importance of Indian Ocean Region and Sri Lanka.

several chokepoints,<sup>5</sup> namely; Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Malacca, Lombok Strait, Sunda Strait, and Cape of Good Hope.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the significance of controlling these chokepoints to dominate Indian Ocean. Regarding dominance of Indian Ocean, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose famous book 'The Influence of Sea Power upon History' had an enormous impact on United States' military and economic expansion in the world since the nineteenth century, had said that, "Whosoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This Ocean is the key to seven seas. In the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters."<sup>7</sup> Similar assertion has been made by Robert Kaplan, a US security analyst through his argument that "Indian Ocean forms the centre stage for the challenges of the twenty-first century."<sup>8</sup>

Persian Gulf in Arabian Sea is the largest producer of oil and gas in the world and provides more than 50% of the global energy needs which are traded through Indian Ocean. It is estimated that only two countries, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, alone have around one third of the total global oil resources.<sup>9</sup> Whereas energy needs of US and Europe largely flow from Persian Gulf/Middle East, China is equally dependent on supply of oil from the same sources. In order to maintain her growing economy, stable and uninterrupted energy supply is extremely crucial for China, therefore the strategic importance of Indian Ocean and the need to keep the Strait of Malacca open for constant flow of trade and commerce.

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<sup>5</sup> Akhtar Majeed, *Indian Ocean: Conflict & regional Cooperation* (New Dehli: ABC Publishing House, 1986). P.1. Cited in Khan Hasham Bin Saddique, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Chokepoints to and from Indian Ocean,  
[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Choke-points-to-and-from-the-Indian-Ocean\\_fig1\\_318959775](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Choke-points-to-and-from-the-Indian-Ocean_fig1_318959775). Accessed December 19, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 333.

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Center Stage for the Twenty-first Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean,"  
*Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 2 (March/April 2009),  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2009-03-01/center-stage-21st-century>.

<sup>9</sup> BP Statistical Review of World Energy June, 2012 ([www.bp.com](http://www.bp.com)). Cited by Khan Hasham Bin Saddique, 12.

In order to ensure freedom of navigation in the international waters and safeguard the SLOC, all regional and extra-regional (global) powers want to dominate the Indian Ocean, which increases its importance for security reasons as well. Such multi-dimensional significance of Indian Ocean has been explained by former Chief of Sri Lankan Navy Admiral Professor Jayanath Colabage, who is present Secretary of Foreign Affairs as well, as follows:

“Indian Ocean is a region of; strategic competition, strategic convergence and of course strategic dilemma. Strategic competition by major powers against major powers, strategic convergence of some major powers against other major powers and strategic dilemma for economically and militarily less powerful states.”<sup>10</sup>

Due to the factors mentioned above, major powers of the world: the US, the United Kingdom, France Russia and China seek to gain strategic advantage by maintaining their presence in the Indian Ocean and by acquiring possession of ports and islands for their naval bases, which help them to project their military power, in addition to facilitating secure environment for their commerce and trade. The US maintains the largest military presence in the Indian Ocean region. In addition to global powers, regional players: Australia, India, South Korea and Japan are also active in taking advantage of global competition in the Indian Ocean region. Some extra-regional countries, such as US and United Kingdom have defence and security agreements with Indian Ocean littoral states, particularly Gulf region, which are leveraged for political and economic objectives.

In the last two decades, the US has displayed more interest in retaining her ascendancy in the Indian Ocean in order to contain Chinese growing influence and due to her military operations against Afghanistan and Iraq, which were intimately supported from her military presence in the Indian Ocean region. For this purpose, the US has encouraged India to play an active and assertive role in the Indian Ocean by shifting her policy from Asia

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<sup>10</sup> Indian Ocean: Strategic, trading and environmental aspects, *Daily FT*, Colombo, September 2, 2019, <http://www.ft.lk/opinion/India-Ocean-Strategic-trading-and-environmental-aspects/14-684938>.

Pivot to Indo-Pacific, which indicates her desire to align her efforts with Australia, India, Japan and South Korea to monitor and restrict Chinese maritime activities in South China Sea and Indian Ocean. "US allies and key trading partners are highly dependent on the Indian Ocean for energy such as Japan receives 90% of oil via the Indian Ocean, while 75% of China's oil imports and 85% of India's oil imports are transited through the Indian Ocean. When it comes to the economic importance of the Indian Ocean, approximately 30% of world trade is handled in the ports of the Indian Ocean and half of the world's container traffic passes through it. In addition, 40 out of 54 types of raw materials used by US industries are supplied by through the Indian Ocean."<sup>11</sup>

### **Geo-Strategic Importance of Sri Lanka in Indian Ocean**

Sri Lanka is a small island that is located south of India in the Indian Ocean. It is around 432km long and about 224km wide and is separated from the Indian sub-continent by the Gulf of Mannar<sup>12</sup> and the Palk Strait.<sup>13</sup> "Ancient Greek geographers called it Taprobane. Arabs referred to it as Serendib. Later European mapmakers called it Ceylon, a name still used occasionally for trade purposes. It officially became Sri Lanka in 1972."<sup>14</sup> Sri Lanka has been of great attraction to nations which were in maritime trade and travel. Sri Lanka derives its strategic importance from its closer proximity of crossroads of maritime routes traversing the Indian Ocean<sup>15</sup> and the control over spice trade, which brought the merchants to Sri Lanka since many centuries.

Portuguese, Dutch and British occupied Sri Lanka for over four centuries due to her geo-strategic importance in maritime trade. "Ceylon, as the island of Sri Lanka was known under Portuguese rule, became a crucial trading hub for cinnamon, cardamom, black

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<sup>11</sup> Madanayaka, SAK, "The Strategic Importance of Sri Lanka in Indian Ocean Region: Reference to String of Pearls Strategy," <http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/345/1728/021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. Accessed December 10, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Sri Lanka, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Sri Lanka - Geography and Maps, <https://www.goway.com/travel-information/asia/sri-lanka/geography-and/>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sri Lanka, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka>.

pepper and gems through agreements with the Kingdom of Kotte, near present-day Colombo.”<sup>16</sup> “After Portugal’s economic collapse in the 1620s, the Dutch East India Company took advantage of an invitation from the ruler of the Kingdom of Kandy to oust the Portuguese. The Dutch deepened and expanded their colonial rule of the island.”<sup>17</sup> England took over Dutch colonies during the Napoleonic Wars, Sri Lanka became a British colony until independence in 1948.<sup>18</sup> “The Indian Ocean is once again the center of global maritime trade, and a rising global power, China, is underwriting the modernization of Sri Lanka’s ports for its gargantuan export volumes.”<sup>19</sup> “With the China’s Maritime Silk Road Initiative, the strategic importance of Sri Lanka has been enhanced by being part of China’s ‘String of Pearls’ strategy over Indian Ocean.”<sup>20</sup>

#### a) *Ports of Sri Lanka*

Sri Lanka has four main ports and few other harbour facilities. Ports of Colombo and Galle are located on the western coast, Hambantota Port is located on the southern tip of the Island, and Trincomalee Harbour is located on the eastern coast. Other minor ports and harbours include Port of Point Pedro at north most point, Kankesanthurai Harbour, which is used by Sri Lankan Navy, and Oluvil Harbour that has been newly developed. Brief description of these facilities is as under:

#### b) *Port of Colombo*

Colombo Port is the largest port of Sri Lanka. “Since 1918, the Port of Colombo had been administered by the Colombo Port Commission.”<sup>21</sup> “In 1958, the Port Cargo Corporation was set up to

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<sup>16</sup> Parag Khanna, “How strategic is Sri Lanka?,” CNN, April 9, 2014, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/09/opinion/sri-lanka-strategic-value-parag-khanna/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> SAK Madanayaka, “The Strategic Importance of Sri Lanka in Indian Ocean Region: Reference to String of Pearls Strategy,”

<http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/345/1728/021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. December 10, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Sri Lanka Port Authority, Who We Are? <https://www.slpa.lk/>. December 10, 2020.

take over these activities performed by a multiplicity of operators. The Port Tally and Protective Services Corporation was formed in 1967. The Sri Lanka Ports Authority was constituted under the provisions of the Sri Lanka Ports Authority Act, No. 15 of 1979.”<sup>22</sup> The “Colombo Port is primarily a container port which has five terminals. It “is a rapidly growing maritime hub of the South Asia region. Cargo originating from and destined to Europe, East and South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa is conveniently and efficiently connected through the Colombo Port.”<sup>23</sup> In 2015, it handled about 5.1 million TEU of containerized cargo.<sup>24</sup>

Jaya Container Terminal has four main container berths, two feeder berths and 45.5 hectares of container terminal area,<sup>25</sup> Unity Container Terminal has two container berths and 1.53 hectares of container terminal area.<sup>26</sup> South Asia Gateway Terminal has an area of 20 hectares.<sup>27</sup> Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT) is the main hub of maritime trade at Colombo. It has been built on a build-operate-transfer (BOT) basis by Colombo International Container Terminals Limited that is a joint venture company of China Merchants Holding (International) Co. Ltd. and Sri Lanka Port Authority.<sup>28</sup> The original port had a harbour area of 184 hectares. In 2008, the South Harbour area (285 hectares) was developed to accommodate deep water berths and the latest generation of mainline vessels. The harbour is served by a two-way channel with an initial depth of 20m and a width of 570m.<sup>29</sup> East Container Terminal (ECT) has been much politicized due to India-China competition in development and management of ports in Sri

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Colombo Port, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/colombo>. December 20, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Terminals, Jaya Container Terminal, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/terminals>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Terminals, Unity Container Terminal, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/terminals>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Terminals, South Asia Gateway Terminal, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/terminals>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT), Colombo Port, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/colombo>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Lanka. The terminal is planned to be developed with the financial support from India and Japan.

c) *Galle Port*

Galle Port is a natural harbour, located in south-western coast of Sri Lanka at Galle. Currently, it is one of the most active regional ports in the country. It also provides facilities for pleasure yachts in Sri Lanka. Many international yacht societies have recognized Galle harbour as one of the world's best attractions for yachting. Galle harbour has been used as the most important harbour in Sri Lanka until 1873 when an artificial harbour was built in Colombo. Though presently, it is being used as commercial harbour, however many facilities provided at Galle Port had been damaged during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.<sup>30</sup> SLPA planned to develop new facilities at Galle. A regional Command Headquarters of Sri Lanka Navy is also located at Galle, which is planned to be shifted to Hambantota Port.

d) *Trincomalee Port/Harbour*

Trincomalee harbour, located on the north-eastern coast of Sri Lanka is the second best natural harbour in the world and the available water and land area is about 10 times as much as the Port of Colombo.<sup>31</sup> Trincomalee, is at present under-utilized as compared to its potential. Though SLPA has identified its prospects and capacity for bulk and break bulk cargo and port-related industrial activities including heavy industries, tourism and agriculture and wishes to develop the port facilities, yet the project has faced many difficulties due to lack of funding, need for foreign investment and power struggle for control of Sri Lankan ports by China and India and the involvement of US in regional affairs. India has shown interest to develop Trincomalee Port as a counterbalance to Chinese investment for developing Hambantota Port.

e) *Hambantota International Port*

The Hambantota Port, located on the southern tip of Sri Lanka, is one of the major development projects undertaken by Sri Lanka Ports Authority with financial assistance from China. "This port is

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<sup>30</sup> Galle Port, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/galle>. December 20, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Trincomalee Port, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/trincomalee>. December 20, 2020.

located in close proximity to the major international east-west shipping route and well-positioned at a strategic location on maritime gateway to India. Large number of ships pass Sri Lanka daily along this shipping route and creates good business opportunities for providing services like supply of fuel, water, crew change in addition to the usual port operations.”<sup>32</sup> In addition to international trade and commerce, Hambantota port has very good domestic trade perspectives as well due its connectivity with direct roadway to the southern, central and eastern areas of the Island. “The harbor area is basically protected by 312m and 988m long two breakwaters. An access channel of 210 m width and 17m depth is provided with a turning circle of 600m diameter and 17m deep to facilitate vessels up to 100,000 DWT.”<sup>33</sup> The contraction of Hambantota and its management by Chinese firm has created a lot of political and diplomatic controversy as US and Indian officials refer it as ‘debt diplomacy’ by China because Sri Lanka has handed over the operational rights of this port to China for 99 years against a loan on of over 1 billion US dollars provided by China to Sri Lanka Government. In addition, Sri Lanka has also granted a long lease of land adjacent to the Port for 99 years, which has been criticized by many nationalist leaders and foreign diplomats and scholars.

f) *Oluvil Port*

The Oluvil Harbour is a newly developed commercial and fishery harbour located in Ampara District, Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The port was opened on September 1, 2013. It has a land of 105 hectares, whereas size of the port is 16 hectares. The was Port was essentially built by the Government of Sri Lanka to provide better economic opportunities to its eastern region, which is relatively underdeveloped as compared to western part of the Island. “This port will form the south-eastern link in the developing chain of coastal harbours in the country and will provide more convenient

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<sup>32</sup> Hambantota International Port, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/hip>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



and cost effective access to and from the south-eastern region for goods and cargo originating on the west coast.”<sup>34</sup>

g) *Kankesanthurai Port*

Kankesanthurai Port has been developed in the northern coast of Jaffna District in Northern Province as a rehabilitation project in an area which was destroyed during the civil war. It is basically a fish harbour and a tourist resort. The project includes repair and rehabilitation of the existing breakwaters, piers and roads and construction of a new pier. The project has been sponsored by the Indian government by providing financial assistance for transforming the harbour into a commercial port and furnish it to handle general cargo. <sup>35</sup> Some Tamils and Indians have criticized this project as, “Sinhalization and Buddhisization of Kankesanthurai through various streams” claiming that development of port in an area which was forcibly got vacated by Sri Lanka Army and Navy during Tamil insurgency, would allow greater access to military personnel to the port area.<sup>36</sup>

### **India's Relation with Sri Lanka and Indian Ambition to Control Sri Lanka Ports**

The relations between India and Sri Lanka date back many centuries due to geographic and ethnic reasons. Sri Lanka is separated from India through a narrow waterway called Palk Strait, which is 40 to 85 miles (64 to 137 km) wide, 85 miles long, and less than 330 feet (100 meters) deep and it contains many islands on the Sri Lankan side.”<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, Tamils living in Jaffna Peninsula of Sri Lanka, who have closer ethnic ties with Indian Tamils living in Tamil Nadu state in India, have had commercial contact with India. Similarly, Indian Tamil had closer commercial, social and religious links with Tamils of Sri Lanka.

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<sup>34</sup> Oluvil Port, <https://www.slpa.lk/port-colombo/oluvil>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> “India To Assist Sri Lanka In Developing Kankesanthurai Harbour Into Commercial Port,” *EurAsian Times Desk*, February 15, 2019, <https://eurasianimes.com/india-to-assist-sri-lanka-in-developing-kankesanthurai-harbour-into-commercial-port/>.

<sup>36</sup> Sinhalization of the North-East: Kankesanthurai (KKS), <https://pearlaction.org/2020/10/26/kks/>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Sri Lanka, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka>.

During the colonization of Sri Lanka by the Portuguese, Dutch and British, its coastal areas on the west coast had closer commercial relations with south and south-eastern coastal areas of India. These commercial links were further strengthened during British colonial rule of India and Sri Lanka as British rulers had developed Colombo as a main commercial port in the region, which had vital importance for their trade from southern India and Bengal to Africa, Europe and Far East.

After independence of India and Sri Lanka in 1947 and 1948 respectively, India and Sri Lanka have generally maintained good relations. Both countries were active members of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Sri Lanka is a founder member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as is India as well. Being a smaller neighbour, Sri Lanka's dependence on especially economic and financial sectors and commerce and trade is quite natural. "Sri Lanka is one of India's largest trading partner in SAARC. Trade between the two countries grew particularly rapidly after the entry into force of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement in March 2000. According to Sri Lankan Customs, bilateral trade in 2018 amounted to US \$ 4.93 billion. Exports from India to Sri Lanka in 2018 were US\$ 4.16 billion, while exports from Sri Lanka to India were US\$ 767 million." India-Sri Lanka trade indicates serious imbalance in favour of India. Indian exports to Sri Lanka are almost five to six times more than imports from Sri Lanka. Major trade activity at Colombo Port includes trans-shipment from India to other destinations in the world.

On the political and diplomatic front, many Sri Lankan senior political leaders have repeatedly complained about India's hegemonic attitude and constant interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. Sri Lanka is inhabited by three ethnic groups; Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Sinhalese form the majority, around 75%, whereas Tamils, who trace their roots in south/south-east India form around 14% and Muslims, who claim their roots from Arab traders are around 10% of total population. Sri Lanka has suffered sporadic ethnic disturbances and "periodic disharmony,"<sup>39</sup> which included a protracted insurgency fought over two decades by Tamil

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Tigers, who fought for separate homeland in the north and north-east. India has been openly accused of active support to Tamil insurgents, for secession from Sri Lanka, in order to seek independence to form a Tamil (Hindu majority community) state in northern and north-eastern Sri Lanka. The civil war continued for over two decades from 1983 to 2009, when Sri Lanka managed to militarily crush the insurgency. The periods of unrest in northern Sri Lanka had disrupted shipping across the strait between Sri Lanka and India. During this period, India military intervened in Sri Lanka on the pretext of sending Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) to Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990.<sup>40</sup> While withdrawing from Sri Lanka, India had forced serious constitutional changes demanding creation of provinces, devolution of administrative powers and transfer of financial autonomy to provinces. This issue has remained controversial since then, as most politicians from of the majority Sinhala ethnic group support unitary form of government and have spoken openly about annulling these constitutional provisions. However, India has been pressurizing successive Sri Lankan governments to fulfil her obligations toward transferring more resources and authority to provinces, especial northern and eastern provinces and their merger as demanded by Tamils of Sri Lanka.

After elimination of Tamil insurgency, Sri Lanka has made considerable efforts for reconciliation and integration of former Tamil Elam militias into normal life by returning their lands occupied by Sri Lankan forces during security operations and by building houses to resettle displaced people and by creating more economic opportunities. In this regard, a port is also being built at Kankesanthurai with Indian government's financial support. Moreover, an airport has been constructed by Sri Lanka with Indian assistance at Jaffna, capital of the northern province. It will be jointly operated by India and Sri Lanka.

In addition, Indian Government is very keen to undertake mega projects, such as building and operating East Terminal at

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Bullion, "The Indian peace-keeping force in Sri Lanka," November 8, 2007, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13533319408413499?journalCode=finp20>.

Colombo Port, taking over management and operation of Mattala International Airport, near Hambantota International Port, developing Trincomalee Port, and reviving the Oil Tank Park at Trincomalee. Most of these projects are being undertaken in order to extend Indian political and diplomatic influence and enhance her leverage in economic and security related matters and to counter the expanding Chinese influence in Sri Lanka. "India is one of the largest investors in Sri Lanka with cumulative investments of around USD 1.239 billion. The investments are in diverse areas including petroleum retail, IT, financial services, real estate, telecommunication, hospitality & tourism, banking and food processing (tea & fruit juices), copper and other metal industries, tires, cement, glass manufacturing, and infrastructure development (railway, power, water supply)."<sup>41</sup>

### **India-China Competition in Sri Lanka and Politics of Ports Management**

Due to strategic importance of Sri Lanka, the US and China are interested to establish relations with the Island state, though in different manners. Since the US considers China as a strategic competitor at global level, therefore, as part of their global strategy, the US wishes to contain expansion of Chinese's influence in Indian Ocean regions. For attaining this objective, the US has undertaken numerous foreign policy and security initiative directly and indirectly as well. Besides her direct interaction on bilateral basis with Sri Lanka, the US is active to coordinate her efforts with Australia, Japan, South Korea and India in Sri Lanka. In fact, India is encouraged to play the role of regional hegemon in Indian Ocean and to counter Chinese political diplomatic and economic initiatives in the region. During his visit to Sri Lanka in February 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that "India was a partner in Sri Lanka's development efforts."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brief on India - Sri Lanka Relations,

[https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/IndSriLanka\\_2019.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/IndSriLanka_2019.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> "India, Sri Lanka to boost joint economic projects, improve connectivity," February 8, 2020,

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/india-sri-lanka-to-boost-joint-economic-projects-improve-connectivity/article30770559.ece>.

After the civil war, Sri Lanka embarked upon rebuilding her economy, as part of national reconstruction and rehabilitation plans, much foreign funds were required. During ten years of President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005–2015), many mega projects were initiated with financial support from China, which included development of Hambantota Port, building of Mattala Airport and South Express Way connecting Colombo with Hambantota in the south. Moreover, China Harbour Engineering Company, a Chinese state owned construction company, has built special financial zone and International Financial Centre, Colombo Port City, a huge mega project by reclaiming 312 hectares (530 acres) land from sea at the most expensive area on Galle Road near Colombo Port. The reclamation was to be carried out by China Harbour Engineering Corporation, who has been engaged by the investor. 125 ha (310 acres) land was given to government as well as 88 ha (220 acres) while owned by the government was planned to be leased for 99 years to the Chinese company.<sup>43</sup> The project was initiated by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's previous government, while he was President prior to 2015. Prime Minister Ranil Wikremesinghe's government announced to renegotiate terms of the project. Resultantly, reclamation work got slowed down. Eventually, the issue was resolved with minor adjustments. A lot has been said about grant of 99 years lease for management and operation of Hambantota Port and a lease of adjacent land to the Chinese company which has constructed the Port. Prime Minister Rajapaksa, during his election campaign, had called for review of these provision calling it as 'selling the port'.<sup>44</sup> Nothing much has happened since he became Prime Minister.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa lost presidential election in 2015, and with President Mathripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wikremesinghe forming a Unity Government for Good Governance, whose political coalition was purportedly supported by India and the US, India became more active in regaining construction and management contracts of some mega projects in Sri Lanka as counter balance to such projects initiated through

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<sup>43</sup> "Port City developer defends itself vigorously," *The Island*, February 22, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> N Sathiyamoorthy, "Sri Lanka to review India's role in Colombo Port terminal work," <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/srilanka-review-india-role-colombo-port-terminal-work/>. Accessed December 21, 2020.

Chinese investments by Rajapaksa. Colombo East Terminal project was one such major breakthrough as joint investment project by India, Japan and Sri Lanka. "In May 2019, Sri Lanka's Mathripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with India and Japan to jointly upgrade the terminal with the aim of enhancing Sri Lanka's status as a maritime hub. As per the MoC, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) was to retain 100% ownership, while a jointly-owned Terminal Operations Company – 51% stake with Sri Lanka, and 49% with India and Japan – would run the terminal. Despite the tripartite understanding, the former government was unable to take the deal forward."<sup>45</sup> It was reported in Indian press that, "Adani Ports was eyeing the Colombo terminal project, with the Indian government's backing."<sup>46</sup> Recently, number of trade unions have protested and staged agitation calling upon the government to rescind the tripartite memorandum with India and Japan to develop Colombo Port's Eastern Container Terminal (ECT), which has the potential to strain bilateral relations with the two countries. Palitha Athukorala, President of the National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka was reported having said that, "Colombo seems to be under great pressure from New Delhi to go ahead with this project. We think our government will concede."<sup>47</sup> It was also reported that the two countries are holding talks for India to reschedule Sri Lanka's \$900 million India debt.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

Sine her independence in 1948, Sri Lanka is confronted with multiple political and financial problems. Sri Lanka's quest for preserving democracy, attaining national cohesion and integration,

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<sup>45</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "No final decision on East Container Terminal, says Sri Lanka," *The Hindu*, November 11, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/amid-heightened-speculation-no-final-decision-on-east-container-terminal-says-sri-lanka/article33076097.ece>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Also see Archana Chaudhary, PR Sanjai, AsanthaSirimanne, "Adani Group set to develop Sri Lanka's East Container Terminal in Colombo port," *Bloomberg*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/adani-group-set-to-develop-sri-lanka-s-east-container-terminal-in-colombo-port-11604395943597.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Srinivasan, "No final decision on East Container Terminal, says Sri Lanka."

<sup>48</sup> N Sathiya Moorthy, Sri Lanka to review India's role in Colombo Port terminal work."

ensuring national security and seeking economic progress was considered as her core national interests. Sri Lanka's geostrategic location, being in the middle of the Indian Ocean is a great advantage but poses a great dilemma as well as to how can Sri Lanka maintain her neutrality and retain her sovereignty. Forging cohesion among three main ethnic groups, out of which one such group, the Tamils living in the north, has strong historical ties and religious connections with neighbouring Tamils of India. These links afford great opportunity to India to interfere in internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

In order to achieve economic progress, like other developing countries, Sri Lanka needs financial assistance from international sources and those wealthy countries who can provide financial assistance for variety of development projects, besides managing her balance of payment shortfalls. All such financial help comes with certain conditions which impinge upon Sri Lanka's sovereignty and independence. Besides, all political leaders ruling the country have their personal and political interests which are directly linked with foreign loans and financial assistance. At present, Sri Lanka's foreign debt is estimated at over 55 billion US dollars, which is around 80% of her GDP. Some of these loans are reported to have been obtained on very high interest rates. Each successive government blames her predecessor for mismanagement, corruption and kickbacks.

Sri Lanka, despite her desire of not being aligned to any global power, cannot escape from realities of real politics. The US, China and India are more active in establishing their influence and enhancing the diplomatic leverage over Sri Lanka. Whereas the US and India do not hesitate in using diplomatic coercion, Chinese prefer to use economic incentives only. China, through her global enterprise of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and 'String of Pearls', a chain of ports along Maritime Silk Route, has tried to offer lot of development projects to Sri Lanka. Among these projects, more prominent are development of Hambantota Port at southern coast of Sri Lanka, with its operating rights and lease of 15000 acres of land adjacent to the port for 99 years, construction of Colombo Port City, a new international investment hub in Colombo and expansion of Commercial Terminal at Colombo Port.

The US is not directly involved in any major investment in Sri Lanka, though they have obtained many political, commercial and military concessions from Sri Lanka under mutual assistance arrangements. However, India, with political and diplomatic encouragement of the US is keenly interested in seeking greater role in development of port facilities and other mega projects. Indian interest include taking control of operations at Colombo Port terminal, development of East Container Terminal with Japanese collaboration, taking control of Trincomalee Port to counter Chinese control of Hambantota Port, taking over Trincomalee Oil Tanks Farm, besides undertaking many smaller projects like construction of houses for displaced Tamils and construction of port at Kankesanthurai the north, which would help India to increase her trade with Tamils, and eventually increasing their leverage to interfere in internal politics of Sri Lanka. Though India has succeeded in gaining greater influence in Sri Lanka's political, commercial and security domain, however, there is considerable resistance from many political leaders and parties, especially those who are left leaning and claim to be more nationalistic.

In future, India-China political and commercial competition in Sri Lanka is likely to intensify. India certainly has the advantage of geographic proximity and historical ties, in addition to her greater influence over Tamils. However, China has even greater advantage of her soft power manifestation backed by more financial resources and technological superiority. It also has a unique advantage of consistency and stability of decision making and perseverance to implement these decisions in the national interest of China in the long-term. Therefore, it can be judged that China would prevail in establishing her lead role in Sri Lanka's economic development, not only in developing and managing the ports but in many other areas as well.



## Chapter No. 6

# Chinese vis-à-vis Indian Approach Towards the Smaller Neighbours: Respect or Bully?

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and Awais Bin Wasi\*\*

### Abstract

This study is an analysis of the Indian approach of regional hegemony being triggered through Modi's expansionism in Kashmir. The study is built on the comparative analysis of the two largest states of this region. The central argument of this study is that the Chinese approach to resolving the conflicts with its smaller nations has been based on respect for neighbour's sovereign equality and has been supported by diplomacy. Contrary to this, Indian policy, since the time of its independence, has been to bully, overpower and dominate the smaller neighbours giving no respect to their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Another factor behind Indian arrogance has been the self-deceptive image of being the regional power even though it lacks the basic ingredients to justify its regional power status. The annexation of the state of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh on 5<sup>th</sup> August was a unilateral move by Modi to change the legal status quo of IIOJK by scarping special status as per article 370 and 35/A is a continuation of the decade's old Indian policy of overstretching beyond its borders. This overconfidence of the hegemon has synergy with the military mobilization of India to advance in the Ladakh region. The study maintains that; it is the compulsion of small neighbours of India to balance the hegemon in an asymmetrical power matrix to contain Indian expansionism. Chinese blockade of India expansionism in Ladakh was 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive move in tandem by India along LAC in Ladakh.

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However, Small Indian neighbours on the west and Pakistan on the east had botched to plug the wrath of Indian hegemony since 1947.

**Keywords:** Kashmir dispute, Regional hegemony, India, RSS, China.

## Background

India's approach to its border stand-off with China in 1962 was marred by a self-deceptive narcissism and irrational approximation of its own and adversary's power resulting in a significant setback for the former. The perception created by Indian electronic and press media has given much hype to the mistaken belief that India is an emerging global economic power. The political manifestations of this fantasy are the main bedrock to promote and consolidate the image of the Modi government's achievements. This false projection of being a global power has further undermined the Indian ability to be in the race for the global power status.<sup>1</sup> India's rivalry with its neighbours, particularly with Pakistan over Kashmir, seems the story of an unending and unresolved tussle for decades.<sup>2</sup> The then Prime Minister of India, I.K. Gujral, commonly known as the Gujral Doctrine,<sup>3</sup> was somewhat relevant as it brought a change in the perception of the political elite, and his policies had some relevance to maintain regional peace.<sup>4</sup> India is still considered a South Asian giant in terms of its size and population and has the third-largest defence budget. However, it is still a developing country in terms of per capita GDP, where a major part of the population does not have access to the basic amenities of life.

India shares its borders with China, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. Its coastline is joined with eight states. Indian strategic moves are multi-directional and multi-dimensional as the political pundit Chanakya Kautilya said that in trans-border

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Mistry, "Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of India as an Emerging World Power" in Subrata K. Mitra ed. *Politics of Modern South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> S. K. Mitra, and J. "The New Dynamics of Indian Foreign Policy and its Ambiguities" *Irish Studies of International Affairs* 18, 19-34.(2007)

<sup>3</sup> Padmaja Murthy, "The Gujral doctrine and beyond," *Strategic Analysis* 23, no. 4 (1999): 639-652.

<sup>4</sup> C. R. Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

relations, there was no permanent friend or permanent enemy or even permanent borders.<sup>5</sup> The only thing which matters is self-interest, and everything ought to be done to save the interest. India is following the same doctrine in the era of interdependence and globalization,<sup>6</sup> which has threatened its neighbours' security. China is its lone challenge in the region because other small states are not at par with India in any dimension of power. Therefore, keeping the Chanakya doctrine<sup>7</sup> in view, India flexes its muscles towards the smaller neighbours and avoids the tussle with China keeping the experience of the 1962 fiasco in consideration.

Other Indian neighbours are always suspicious of India because of its interference in internal matters. India is always trying to manipulate the politics and control of water resources of the Indus Basin, including the waters of the Indus, the Jhelum, and the Chenab.<sup>8</sup> However, this Indo-centrism is not in the interest of its small neighbours as Indian hegemony over the smaller neighbours<sup>9</sup> on its eastern and southern stretches is maintained by its doctrine of expansionism. Nepal and Bhutan are landlocked states completely and utterly dependent on India for their survival. Water resources of Bangladesh and Pakistan are under India's clutches by its geographic location, providing it the advantage of being the upper-riparian state. India's expanding quest from north to the east has resulted in the absorption of islands of the Goa, Dew, Daemon, Andaman, and Nicobar into Indian territory by force.

Indian ways of hegemony have multi-dimensional impacts in the South Asian region based on hegemonic military-led political strategy. The pursuit of Indian expansionism to maintain regional hegemony is an empirically proved power play on the ground

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<sup>5</sup> V. K. Subramanian, *Maxims of Chanakya: Kautilya*. Abhinav Publications, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Streeten, Paul. "Integration, interdependence, and globalization," *Finance & Development* 38, no. 2 (2001): 34-34.

<sup>7</sup> Prathama Banerjee, "Chanakya/Kautilya: History, philosophy, theater and the twentieth-century political," *History of the Present* 2, no. 1 (2012): 24-51.

<sup>8</sup> R. Mukherji, "India's Foreign Economic Policies" in Sumit Ganguly ed. *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Dabhade, Manish, and Harsh V. Pant, "Coping with challenges to sovereignty: Sino-Indian rivalry and Nepal's foreign policy," *Contemporary South Asia* 13, no. 2 (2004): 157-169.

whereby the latter adopted a four-prong strategy to annex small neighbouring independent nations:

a) *Territorial Expansion*

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is not the only disputed territory illegally occupied by India since 1947, and its military machine has been deployed in nine states till 1975, beginning from the same period. However, Kashmir is the only internationally recognized dispute as per UNCIP resolutions. On August 5, 2019, India operationalized its strategy at the tactical level in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir and fully annexed it finally by violating the letters and spirit of its own constitution. Previously, a similar pattern was applied in Junagarh (April 1948), Hyderabad (November 1948), Andaman, Nicobar & Assam (1950), Goa (1961), Nagaland (1963), and Sikkim (1975). Kashmir, a Muslim majority state having a geographic, political, cultural, and ideological affinity with Pakistan, was annexed on the basis that the Hindu Maharaja signed the contentious Instrument of Accession with India, which is considered questionable by many independent researchers and historians, including the British historian Alastair Lamb. Ironically, the same argument used for the annexation of Kashmir was not applied to Hyderabad and Junagarh, nor Hindu majority states that were being ruled by Muslim rulers at the time of partition.

b) *Regional Hegemony*

India kept expanding outside its frontiers after 1947 and thwarted the attempts to maintain regional peace. The forcible postponement of four SAARC Summit by India is a case in point:

Summits on four occasions: i) 1991 (6<sup>th</sup> Summit in Colombo), ii) 1999 (11<sup>th</sup> Summit in Kathmandu), iii) 2013 (12<sup>th</sup> Summit in Islamabad), and iv) 2005 (13<sup>th</sup> Summit in Dhaka). India's hegemonic machination is also evident when it funded Mukti Bahini and deploying four divisions of the Indian Army to dismember Pakistan. Also, India tried to bifurcate Sri Lanka in 1984 by dividing the Sri Lanka mainland between Colombo and Jaffna Peninsula.

c) *Ideological Strategy*

India's current policy also seems inspired by the ideology of Mahabharat (Greater India)<sup>10</sup>. It seems that this ideology of establishing a great Hindu empire<sup>11</sup> and India's colonial desire is at the heart of India's repressive policy towards its neighbours. The visible focus on Hindutva in BJP's manifesto, its vision document, and the policies pursued in the country reflect India's ideological strategy.

d) *Defensive Offensive Doctrine*

Since the formation of the BJP government in 2014 India is pursuing the Defensive Offensive doctrine constructed and spelled out by India's current security advisor Ajit Doval. According to which, .. 'to defend ourselves, we will go to the place where the offensive is coming'.<sup>12</sup>

### **A Comparison of India and China's Ties with their Neighbours**

The difference between India and China can be understood by knowing how India behaved with its neighbours and what sort of strategy has been followed in its drive towards global and regional power status compared to China, which adopted the cooperation policy<sup>13</sup>. The chart given below explains the difference between the dealing of India and China with their small bordering neighbours:

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<sup>10</sup> Nick Sutton, "Aśoka and Yudhisthira: A Historical Setting for the Ideological Tensions of the Mahābhārata?," *Religion* 27, no. 4 (1997): 333-341.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Hopkirk and David Case, *The Great Game: The struggle for empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Praveen Donthi, Undercover: Ajit Doval in Theory and Practice, *A Journal of Politics and Culture*, (2017): 44.

<sup>13</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "China's periphery policy and its Asian neighbors," *Security Dialogue* 30, no. 3 (1999): 335-346.

### India-China: Approach towards Neighbours

Small Neighbours	India's Approach	China's Approach
Pakistan	<p>(1) Violated the partition plan and landed her troops of 111 Sikh regiment in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, which was not only an independent Muslim majority state ruled by Hindu monarch, but having geographical, political, and historic relations with Pakistan and occupied 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of Jammu and Kashmir State. It was an absolute violation of the two-nation theory.</p> <p>(2) India took Kashmir to the UN herself but never implemented the UNCIP<sup>14</sup> resolutions to date.</p> <p>(3) Trained, financed, and facilitated the Bengali militant outfit <i>Mukti Bahini</i> to separate East Pakistan and created Bangladesh in 1971. Also deployed two divisions of the Indian Army to support separatism.</p>	<p>1) China settled the border disputes with Pakistan in northeast regions and inducted the article-(6) in agreement while mentioning when final settlement of Kashmir will be decided the area of the Shaksgam near trans-Karakorum pass will be re-negotiated</p> <p>2) China always supported the peaceful resolution of Kashmir and the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir while recognizing that Kashmir is a disputed territory, including the areas controlled by China, and negotiated with Pakistan.</p> <p>3) China supported all bilateral talks between India and Pakistan and emphasized the peaceful settlement of</p>

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations Commission of India and Pakistan. Retrieved from [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

	<p>(4) Scrapped the Simla pact of 1972, violated the status quo and occupied the Siachen Glacier's northeast area in 1984.</p> <p>(5) Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan<sup>15</sup> was trained and funded by India while using the Afghan mainland to destabilize the Durant Line<sup>16</sup> between Afghanistan-Pakistan.</p> <p>(6) India is training and funding the terrorist organizations in Baluchistan, such as BLA<sup>17</sup> and other splinter groups, for decades.</p>	<p>Kashmir according to the Kashmiri people's wishes.</p> <p>4) Took Kashmir issue at UNSC and showed concern about India's unilateral decisions to change the status quo of the disputed territory.</p>
Sri Lanka	<p>1) In 1974 India tried to occupy the 235 Acre Island of Katchathood.</p> <p>2) The militant organization LTTE was funded and trained to divide the Jaffna from the mainland of Sri Lanka</p>	

<sup>15</sup> Acharya, Arabinan, Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, and Sadia Sulaiman. "Making money in the Mayhem: Funding Taliban insurrection in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 2 (2009): 95-108.

<sup>16</sup> The border divides Pakistan and Afghanistan (2430 kilometers Long)

<sup>17</sup> Baluchistan Liberation Army.

	<p>and created the Sinhala State. This militant organization was the first to use suicide bombers. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE)<sup>18</sup> killed the President of Sri Lanka and the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. Later, this militancy was curbed with the help of Air Vice-Marshal Shehzad Aslam Chaudhry of Pakistan, having a nod of the Pakistan government.</p>	
Myanmar	<p>India is claiming the mainland area of Myanmar named "Namfalang." It is in the vicinity of the Indian province of Manipur but is an integral part of Myanmar. India is maintaining pressure to occupy this area.</p>	<p>China compromised with the small neighbour in 1956-1957. China only took 18% of the disputed territory and settled all border disputes with Myanmar. She gave her relaxation to settle the disputes at her will, including surrendering the Salt mine area in favour of the small nation along with the national highway claim.</p>
Bhutan	<p>Bhutan is in India's jaws as a proxy state having internal autonomy, but India controls defence and</p>	<p>China tried to settle all disputes with Bhutan while compromising on the 24%</p>

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<sup>18</sup> Jo Becker, *Funding the "final war": LTTE intimidation and extortion in the Tamil diaspora* 18, no. 1. Human Rights Watch, (2006): 17



	foreign policy. India is engaged in occupying the "Sar bang" and "Gaylakfung," an integral part of Bhutan's mainland.	area.  Since India controls Bhutan's foreign policy, she sabotaged this proposal to surrender two areas while surrendering Dokhlam to China. India claims these areas are strategically vital for India to control northeast provinces.
Bangladesh	<p>This eastern part of Pakistan was separated by the Indian invasion in 1971. India was claiming the area of "Bangla Bandu," located at the Delta of the Brahmaputra. India negotiated to give 7 thousand acres of the marshy land and negotiated to take 7000 acres strategically crucial for China.</p> <p>Modi-led regime settled border disputes with Bangladesh but imposed the NRC bill <sup>19</sup>based on religion, which affects Bangladesh badly. This dispute is now a hot subject in Bangladesh with India.</p>	China vetoed Bangladesh's UN membership in 1974 in favour of Pakistan. However, Dhaka established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1978. China was constructing a bridge connecting Dhaka with Munshignaj over the Baringa river. Bangladesh is now part of OBOR <sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gunawan, Yordan, Sonya Whisler Refisyanti, Aliza Mufida, Kuku Derajat Takarub, and Aisah Nur, "Jurisdiction of International Court of Justice (ICJ) Over the Genocide Violations: with Special References to Rohingya Case," *Fiat Justisia: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum* 14, no. 4 (2020): 313-336.

Nepal	<p>Nepal is a landlocked small Himalayan state having no seaport.</p> <p>It is a declared Hindu state with Hinduism as the national religion.</p> <p>Nepal was never enslaved. Hence, they do not celebrate Independence Day.</p> <p>The 34 Battalions of the Gorkha regiment are serving in the Indian Army.</p> <p>India is occupying 400 km of Nepal's mainland, which was part of Nepal since British India called "Kalpana."</p> <p>India had also controlled the Leepo lake area, where she built the road unilaterally without Nepal's consent. Nepal has now issued a new map and passed the resolution in parliament to consolidate this claim.</p> <p>Nepal faced blockade twice by India in 1989 and 2015-2016.</p>	<p>China compromised 75% of the total disputed land with Nepal and returned all agricultural land to Nepal. She settled the dispute just controlling 2676 km of an area in which Mount Everest's area is not included.</p>
Afghanistan	<p>India does not share a border with Afghanistan but wants to maintain strategic relations with Kabul. Warlords of Afghanistan are used as a proxy against Pakistan. India funded Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)</p>	<p>China shares borders with Afghanistan along the Wakhan Corridor, separating Tajikistan and Pakistan. China unilaterally accepted 7381 sq. kilometres under the control of Afghanistan, and China claimed no disputed</p>

	<p>Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) <sup>21</sup>and other terrorist groups who created havoc in Pakistan while operating from Afghanistan. Indian agencies are covertly operating through Iran, which Pakistan has busted with the arrest of Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian Navy officer<sup>22</sup>. Pakistan has lost 70,000 people in its fight against terrorism. India has opened a two-front war by pumping money into Afghanistan. India invested \$4 billion in Afghanistan and built a dam on the river Kabul where Pakistan is a lower riparian.</p>	<p>area in return. This agreement was totally and entirely in favour of Afghanistan. China intends to bring Afghanistan onboard its OBOR initiative<sup>23</sup>.</p>
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### Beijing's Approach towards its Neighbours

In stark contrast to India's approach towards its neighbours. China has always followed the strategy of cooperation and remained observant of treaties. Neville Maxwell observes:

Beijing enters the 21st century having settled its land boundaries with all its neighbours except India and Bhutan. The instance of Vietnam apart, the record suggests that where territorial issues are concerned, China acts as a responsible and disciplined member of the international

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<sup>21</sup> Javeria Jahangir, "Political Culture of Balochistan during Military Regime of General Pervez Musharraf and Indian Interest in Balochistan," *Journal of Indian Studies* 6, no. 1 (2020): 101-136.

<sup>22</sup> Jadhav, Kulbhushan, "A Self-Confessed "State Actor"," *Defence Journal* 20, no. 10, (May 2017): 78-79.

<sup>23</sup> Erdenebileg, Temuulen, "What Factors are Behind Some States Supporting China's Belt and Road Initiative and Other States Pushing Back Against It." " PhD diss., Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School, 2019.

community, observant of its treaty commitments and considerate of the interests of other powers, whether large or small; and that it is not a threat to its neighbours or in its region - but may be threatened by American refusal to countenance China's emergence and consolidation as a great regional power. (Neville Maxwell, 2006, p. 10)

Similarly, another expert of Asia Security, Bisley from La Trobe University, observed that China managed to resolve all the major conflicts with the neighbours except India amicably. He says:

From the mid-1980s onwards, China moved away from previous Maoist foreign policy and decided in the interests of getting on with its neighbours to resolve all of the disputed land-based borders, and did so with pretty much everyone except India (Robert Burton-Bradley March 9, 2019, ABC News).

Apropos China's dispute with Pakistan, Bisley observes that China has amicably settled this disputed and ushered in the new era of close cooperation between them.

In 1962, in exchange for Pakistan recognising China's seat at the United Nations, the two signed an agreement where Pakistan ceded a portion of the disputed territory to China, while China recognises Pakistan's control over the remaining portion. (ibid)

### **Indian Modus Operandi to deal with its Neighbours**

Contrary to Macau's Chinese policies, India entirely occupied and merged Goa<sup>24</sup> with Indian Union though both territories were evacuated as colonies of Portugal and Britain. Beijing maintained the 'One country, two systems' policy<sup>25</sup> in Hong Kong after its return by the British as per the agreement, but there is no such example like this by India. India diluted the independent status of Sikkim and merged it with India. India is a regional player and power but her modus operandi while dealing with neighbours is hegemonic at both strategic and tactical levels. Though a great democracy, but her state policies with the neighbouring small

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<sup>24</sup> SS Mendes, GOA, Nehru's. "Visit to Portuguese . Jawaharlal Nehru and Liberation Struggle of Goa." <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44147974>

<sup>25</sup> So, Alvin Y, "“One country, two systems” and Hong Kong-China national integration: A crisis-transformation perspective," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41, no. 1 (2011): 99-116.

nations are driven by hegemonic style under a democratic face. India does not comply with the international agreements. She has totally disregarded the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir. Furthermore, India scraped the bilateral treaty of 1972 and annexed the Siachen Glacier in 1984, which falls in Pakistani Kashmir's territory.

The regional hegemon had captured Jammu and Kashmir's militarily major parts in 1947 and kept gaining time since then through multi-level diplomacy. She captured the North-East States, including Sikkim, in 1975, Goa, Diu, and Daman in 1984.

The modus operandi being operationalized by the current regime in India seems inspired by the doctrine of Golwalkar Doctrine<sup>26</sup> enshrined in the RSS vision<sup>27</sup>. India's drive of regional expansionism and the huge defence budget of 71 US billion dollars reflect India's questionable designs<sup>28</sup>.

## Conclusions

The comparative analysis of China's approach towards its neighbours and India's approach towards its neighbours suggests the stark difference between their approaches. The study transpires that China has by and large managed to resolve all the major disputes with its neighbours amicably and largely managed the conflicts with its neighbours except those with India, while India's approach towards its neighbour seems contrary to the one adopted and pursued by China. India on the other hand turned the irritants and cleavages with its neighbours into the fault lines and brought some neighbours especially China and Pakistan eyeball to eyeball. Apart from these two countries, India's ties with its neighbours had been further deteriorated due to its hegemonic approach and meddling into the internal affairs of the neighbouring states.

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<sup>26</sup> Kelkar, Sanjeev. *Lost Years of the RSS*. SAGE Publications India, 2011. Venkatesh, Archana. "Right-Wing Politics in India."

<sup>27</sup> Panthaplethottiyil, Jose, and Jose Nedumparae. "Religion and Politics," *Journal of Dharma* 25, no. 3&4 (2000): 294-324.

<sup>28</sup> Mohanty, Ranjan Kumar, Sidheswar Panda, and Biswabhusan Bhuyan, "Does defence spending and its composition affect economic growth in India?," *Margin: The Journal of Applied Economic Research* 14, no. 1 (2020): 62-85.

inspired by its hegemonic and expansionist approach. To balance India in the region demands a new alliance and partners to cap Indian offensive realism powered by Moditwa religious ideology, which is an advanced shape of the Hindutwa.

### **Recommendations**

- a) Pakistan needs to project India's expansionist and hegemonic design jeopardizing the peace and harmony of the region and the global peace in general as the region is characterised by three nuclear powers.
- b) Since SAARC could not achieve its purpose of maintaining regional cooperation, there is a need to create a new alliance of South Asian Economic Alliance (SAEA) to promote peace, progress, and development in the region
- c) Pakistani needs to cultivate close cooperation with countries such as Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives and try to protect them from India's hegemonic ambitions and facilitate them to achieve their full economic potential.
- d) While Pakistan has already developed a strategic partnership with China, it needs to be further strengthened and to be capitalized on for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute
- e) SAEA is required because SAARC is irrelevant and defunct, bringing all neighbouring nations on board.
- f) Pakistan shall raise the Siachin Issue and coordinate with China's forces stationed along DODB road near Galwan valley and connect the LoC with the LAC in the northwest.

## Chapter No. 7

# Kashmir Aftermath of August 05, 2019: An Appraisal

Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik\*

### Abstract

The government of India on August 05, 2019 abrogated the article 370 and 35 A of the Indian constitution. Through new laws India is spearheading a drive of state-sponsored demographic change in an effort to turn a majority-Muslim region into a Hindu-majority one. These developments are especially alarming since India's decision will bring the structural changes in the politics, culture and demography of the valley. In India, the decision has received widespread support from the Hindu nationalists who had long demanded a permanent integration of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) into India. In Pakistan, however, the Indian move has been viewed as illegal and inconsistent with its international and bilateral agreements. In this connection this paper aims to analyse the changes in context of law fare made in different laws after 05 August 2019 till December 2020. The main objective will be to assess the short term and long-term implications of state sponsored law fare on the demography and socio-politics in the valley.

**Keywords:** Article 370 and 35A, New Citizenship Laws, Domicile Laws, Censorship, Human Rights Commission.

### Introduction

August 05, 2019 is considered the darkest day in the annals of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK), when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi revoked article 370 and 35A. The Article 35A in the Indian constitution had empowered the legislature of IIOJK, granted a right to classify unending resident of the state, given a special rights to the indigenous residents. The

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constitutional order under article 370 was added via a presidential order on May 14, 1954.<sup>1</sup> Privileges and incentives given to the masses of Kashmir included ability to vote and contest elections, to buy land and obtaining government employment getting other important dividends such as higher education and healthcare. Most importantly, these privileges were not entitled to non-Kashmiris. The Indian act of abrogating article 370 and 35A unilaterally surged a worldwide condemnation, viewed the act as converting Muslim majority state into minority by allowing Hindus to settle in the state.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan strongly reacted to revoking of the Article 370 of the Indian constitution, perceived it as a political blunder by Modi's government. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan asserted that "Pakistan strongly condemns and rejects the announcements made today by the Indian Government regarding the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir,"<sup>3</sup> Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, articulated that revocation of article 370, by and large, exacerbated Kashmir's problem. "The move to abolish Article 35A has left India's so-called democratic face open to the world. The Kashmir leadership does not agree with India's decision. India has resurrected the Kashmir problem with its decision," he added.<sup>4</sup>

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, was also worried about deteriorating situation of Kashmir in the aftermath of August 05, 2019 emphasized that India and Pakistan had to abide by the Simla Agreement 1972 which states that "the final status of Jammu and Kashmir is to be settled by peaceful means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations."<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile,

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<sup>1</sup> Justice (R) Fakhar-Un-Nisa Khokhar, "Abrogation of Article 370 and 35A by India," *The News International*, September 7, 2019.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/523121-abrogation-of-article-370-and-35a-by-india>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Article 370 Revoked: Pakistan Condemns Modi Govt's Kashmir Decision, Calls It 'illegal'," *Business Today*, August 5, 2019,

<https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/jammu-and-kashmir-crisis-pakistan-condemns-india-move-says-will-exercise-all-options-to-counter-illegal-steps/story/370612.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Statement Attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on the Situation in Jammu and Kashmir," United Nations Secretary-General, August 8,



previous chief minister of Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti, expressed her discontentment over revocation of the article 370 saying that "Decision of J&K leadership to reject 2 nation theory in 1947 & align with India has backfired. Unilateral decision of GOI to scrap Article 370 is illegal & unconstitutional which will make India an occupational force in J&K,"<sup>6</sup> Omar Abdullah previous Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, in this regard, asserted that the move by all means was against the will of people of the Kashmir, proving to be a betrayal of trust and faith of the oppressed and marginalized Kashmiris.<sup>7</sup>

### **Abolishing Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission**

Modi's obsessed with implementation of Hindutva ideology, the ideology based on hatred against Muslims has closed J&K Human Rights Commission, Information Commission. After August 05, Jammu and Kashmir administration in 2021 would be controlled by the Modi government shutting down human rights commission. The following commissions ironically were ended up by Modi government, such as, State Commission for Protection of Women and Child Rights (SCPWCR), Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), State Accountability Commission (SAC), State Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPwD), State Information Commission (SIC), State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (SCDRC).<sup>8</sup> It is pertinent to mention that October 31, 2019, was the date when IIOJK had been split into two Union Territories like Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>9</sup> The bona fide objective behind abolishment of such commissions was attributed to issuing new commissions like National Human Rights

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2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-08-08/statement-attributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-the-situation-jammu-and-kashmir>.

<sup>6</sup> "Dark Day for Democracy: Mehbooba Mufti on Scrapping of Article 370 for India's Jammu and Kashmir," *Gulf News*, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/dark-day-for-democracy-mehbooba-mufti-on-scrapping-of-article-370-for-indias-jammu-and-kashmir-1.1564989656723>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Government Shuts Down J&K Human Rights Commission, Information Commission," *The Wire*, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://thewire.in/government/jk-administration-winds-up-seven-state-commissions>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Commission, ought to be governed by central bodies in accordance with act passed by parliament on August 5, 2019 claiming that Ladakh and Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir will be administrated like the Union Territory of Puducherry.<sup>10</sup>

### **New citizenship laws/ Domicile Laws**

After division of IIOJK into two Union territories, Modi government rejected rights of people of the Kashmir and rubbed salt on to the wounds on people of Kashmir by enacting a new domicile law for IIOJK called “Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (adaptation of state laws) Order 2020”<sup>11</sup>. New law argues that those Indians who have lived in IIOJK for more than 15 years and students who have spent nearly seven years and appeared in 10 to 12 examinations are permanent residents of the occupied Kashmir. Above all, the law has granted an increasing empowerment to the tehsildars (sub-divisional officers) to issue domicile certificates to the Indians within their territorial jurisdiction. The law gives permission to government of IIOJK, having a complete right to appoint a person who is eligible for this purpose.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, Ministry of Home Affairs of India issued a notice that allowed Indians for all jobs. Meanwhile, merely jobs of clerks, constables and peon were reserved for the indigenous domicile holders in IIOJK. The new law particularly the clauses which define job opportunities embarked the path to resentments not only in Kashmir but also in Jammu that is believed to be the only Hindu majority area. Even Harshdev Singh, Leader of Jammu based

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<sup>10</sup> M. S. Pandit, “J&K Orders Human Rights and Accountability Bodies Shut So New Ones Can Spring Up,” *The Times of India*, October 26, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/jk-orders-human-rights-and-accountability-bodies-shut-so-new-ones-can-spring-up/articleshow/71780280.cms>.

<sup>11</sup> “Amid Coronavirus Lockdown, Govt Comes Up With Domicile Law For Jammu And Kashmir”, *Outlook*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-govtcomes-up-with-domicile-law-for-jammu-and-kashmir/349830>

<sup>12</sup> Hakeem Irfan Rashid “Insult heaped on injury says Omar Abdullah on new domicile law”, *The Economic Times*, April 2, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/insult-heaped-on-injury-says-omar-onnew-domicile-law/articleshow/74937570.cms?from=mdr>

Panthers Party went for protests against the newly law and formed Apni Party.<sup>13</sup> Growing demonstrations compelled Modi government to ponder over the new law. Resultantly, on April 4, 2020 due to mounting pressure, Indian government made some amendments and all jobs were reserved for domicile holders.<sup>14</sup> After the announcement of domicile Laws, there has been increasing concern and fear in the Kashmir, believing it is clear manifestation of Modi's government intention to open the path to the settlement of non-Kashmiris into Kashmir resulting in changing of the demography of IIOJK. Omar Abdullah, termed the law as an "insult heaped on injury."<sup>15</sup>

Flooding of non-Kashmiris particularly Hindus into Kashmir will have a great deal of ramifications on resources and ecological system of Jammu and Kashmir. Siddiq Wahid a political analyst, while giving an interview to Al Jazeera expressed that "Obviously it is an attempt to change the demographics, not only change but flood it. It will lead to demographic flooding;"<sup>16</sup> whilst, Sheikh Showkat Hussain, asserted that "The whole purpose of revoking Article 370 was to settle outsiders here and change the demography of the state. Now this provides modalities and entitles so many categories of Indians whose settlement will be legalised over here."<sup>17</sup> Omar Abdullah, while expressing his disappointment over Modi's government failures in curbing the pandemic said that "Talk about suspect timing. At a time when all our efforts and attention should be focused on the COVID-19 outbreak the government slips in a new domicile law for J&K. Insult is heaped on injury when law offers none of the protections that had been promised."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Demographic Flooding: India Introduces New Kashmir Domicile Law," *Al Jazeera*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/1/demographic-flooding-india-introduces-new-kashmir-domicile-law>.

2. "short title."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## New media policy for the region

There is no denying of the fact that media plays a pivotal role in construction of state's narratives. In order to promote Modi's government narrative in IIOJK the Jammu and Kashmir administration on June 2, 2020, initiated media policy for Kashmir "Media Policy 2020." The main objective of Media Policy 2020 is to "ensure a synchronized and effective use of all forms of media to build public trust, foster a genuinely positive image of the Government based on performance and strengthen the relationship with key stakeholders."<sup>19</sup> The real objective of the new media policy is to "thwart mis-information, fake news and be alert to any attempts to use the media to incite communal passions, preach violence, or to propagate any information prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity".<sup>20</sup>

Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) have been empowered to monitor media outlets and journalists in IIOJK to prevent fake news, misinformation, anti-national activities and plagiarism. Gowhar Geelani Srinagar-based journalist argued that "The [DIPR] will be the judge, jury and the executioner to describe any news item or an opinion piece as 'anti-national', 'seditious', and 'unethical'."<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, Sheikh Showkat Hussain, while expressing his displeasure over DIPR alleged that "For months [the government] denied us access to the internet and then provided us with 2G services, but those 2G services are also shut down at least once or twice a week under the pretext of militant encounters or COVID-19."<sup>22</sup>

Modi's government has triggered exceedingly harsh policies to curb freedom of expression in IIOJK by cutting off advertisements of newspapers, bringing them to the knees to propagate only the

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<sup>19</sup>Misbah Reshi, "Media Policy 2020: Mocking Freedom of Speech and Expression in Jammu and Kashmir," *The Leaflet*, September 21, 2020, <https://www.theleaflet.in/media-policy-2020-mocking-freedom-of-speech-and-expression-in-jammu-and-kashmir/#>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Media Policy Adds to Challenges for Kashmiri Press," Voice of America, July 8, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/media-policy-adds-challenges-kashmiri-press>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

agenda of Indian government. Geelani, in this regard, said that "Editors and newspaper owners will not want to annoy the government for the fear of losing advertisement revenue, which will have a devastating impact on independent journalism."<sup>23</sup> Journalists were already under self-censoring implementation of DIPR will further add fuel to the fire and growing restrictions of the Indian government will make task harder for the journalists to show the ground realities to the world. Whatever news comes will be scrutinized and will be broadcasted according to the whims of the Indian government. Ostensibly, news of Indian government will conceal its atrocities and oppressions in IIOJK and will certainly equate freedom movement of Kashmir with terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

Curbing freedom of speech is mockery on so-called Indian largest democracy in the world. After revocation of Article 370, freedom movement of Kashmir has witnessed the largest internet blockade in the largest democracy of the world. Internet has proved an instrumental tool in dissemination of the voices of oppressed Kashmiris to the globe. Modi has violated the Article 19(1) (a) of Indian constitution ushering the path to freedom of speech.<sup>25</sup>

### **Case of 67 liquor shops opening in the valley**

A new controversy erupted in already volatile region over the opening of new liquor shops at mass scale when an official notification of excise department issued on June 16, 2020 got viral on social media. Various factions had opposed the policy of government of the Union territory and severe criticism could be seen from every corner of the valley.<sup>26</sup> According to the notification, the excise department of the Jammu and Kashmir government identified the spots for opening of new liquor shops at different locations in the valley. Excise commissioner J&K Rajesh Kumar mentioned in the official documents forwarded to finance commissioner that his department had exercised the power under

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Media Policy Adds to Challenges for Kashmiri Press," *Voice of America*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/media-policy-adds-challenges-kashmiri-press>.

<sup>26</sup> Hilal Mir. "Kashmir: Liquor Sale Proposal Triggers Outrage." *Anadolu Ajansi*. June 22, 2020.

rule 28 of the J&K liquor and license section 4(B) of the excise Act, and identified 183 new spots, 116 in Jammu and 67 in Kashmir region, for the sale of Alcohol.<sup>27</sup>

Excise department, under the official letter (No EC/Exc/Sub-vend/663), requested finance department's approval for liquor shop proposal to proceed further in this regard. At present, the valley has 224 liquor vends, out of which 220 liquor vends are located in Jammu and four in Kashmir valley, run under high security protection due to fear of threat posed by banned outfits.<sup>28</sup> In light of sharp criticism from civil society, and the religious as well as political parties, government spokesperson tweeted that the finance department had not taken any policy decision regarding the issuance of fresh liquor licenses in unserved areas. No list of unserved areas had either been considered or approved. And no decision would be taken without the participation of stakeholders and due process.

Historically, the opening of liquor shops in the valley at large scale witnessed vigorous uprising, especially since 1990. The Allah Tigers declared blanket ban on liquor, its sale and its consumption after the rise of militancy in the valley.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the sale of liquor has been threatened in the valley by militants but rarely attack has been made on them. For instance, in 2004, the owner of a liquor shop was shot dead by militants in Srinagar-summer capital of the valley. In another case, the wine shops came under attacks launched by militants in Srinagar and Kashmir in 2012. The opening of liquor vends and later, their closure out of threats has been a perpetual pattern in Kashmir. In fact, the valley is not declared officially a "dry region." As of now, there are 27 wholesale liquor vends in the valley out of which 27 are located in Jammu and one in Kashmir. Surprisingly, there are 14 wholesale traders from Jammu

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<sup>27</sup> Sofi. "Govt Identifies 67 Spots in Valley to Open Liquor Stores." *Kashmir Observer*. June 20, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Tribune News Service. "67 Sites Identified for Opening Liquor Shops in Kashmir." *Tribune India News Service*. June 21, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Ishfaq-ul-Hassan. "Jammu and Kashmir Government Rules out Ban on Liquor." *DNA India*. June 25, 2016.

and a woman from Kashmir whom government has issued license for producing alcohol outside the state.<sup>30</sup>

Opening the liquor shops at such a huge scale may further aggravate the already hostile situation in the Valley. People are conceptually linking the attempt to open more liquid liquor shops at different locations to some deep saga of conspiracies fetched at New Delhi to weaken the bonds of freedom struggle and to divert the minds of youth towards this exciting fugue. It is a fact that Islam strongly prohibits the consumption of any drug that intoxicates the mind. Kashmir is a Muslim majority area. Hence, it is presumed that the act might be an attempt to neutralize the religious ethos of the valley. Just as India introduced a legislation that banned sale and slaughter of cow in the Hindu dominated area because it undermines the sacredness of Hindus; allowing free sale of liquor in a Muslim majority region, however, in violation to the religious sacredness of Muslims is none less than state owned extremism.<sup>31</sup> The move instigated the already oppressed people of Kashmir and expressed their strong condemnation and dissatisfaction. While expressing his fear over the above discussed development, Grand Mufti of Kashmir identified it as an attack on their culture and they would oppose it. Mufti Nasir-ul Islam warned that they would call a meeting of all religious leaders and would take into consideration strategy on how to stop it. In his words, as of now, they aren't sure how they would go about it but it will be opposed with full might. Hence, the policy of the J&K government for opening of liquor vends and providing bottle at doorsteps serve no moral purpose but reflects mindset of the fascist regime of Modi aimed at eroding religious ethos of the Muslim majority region.

### **New Land laws in Kashmir**

The Home Ministry of India notified two orders on October 26, 2020, that abrogated 12 Acts and amended 14 laws related to property and domicile in the erstwhile state of J&K. People believe that this move implies the accomplishment of the malign scheme of BJP for taking away the special status of the J&K. In fact, on August

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<sup>30</sup> Excise and Taxation Department - Jammu Excise.

<sup>31</sup>Tawfeek Irshad Mir. "Will it serve any purpose to open liquor shops in Kashmir?" *Dawn*. July 21, 2020

5, 2019, Indian parliament, Lok Sabha, repealed Articles 370 and 35A both of which granted the state of J&K a special status under the Indian Constitution. Although, Article 35A of the Indian constitution empowered the permanent residents living in the state of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The Article demonstrated that people living in the state of J&K as of May 14, 1954, "that is when the law came into effect; and those who had lived in the valley for ten years any time since then, are considered as permanent residents of the valley." Moreover, under article 35A, state government is the only authorized entity to issue permanent resident certificates that gives special privileges to the native inhabitant of the valley. Elaborating it, only permanent residents of the state have the right to buy and own property within the state; the legislative body of the state retains the authority to change the definition of a permanent resident and only permanent resident is entitled to be eligible for the government vacancies and scholarships. The law was first introduced in 1927, in the state of J&K by the Maharaja Hari Singh with the aim to protect the rights of permanent residents at a time when massive influx of population took place from Northern Punjab.

The 12 laws that have been repealed were considered crucial for the ownership of land and citizenship in the former state. Only permanent residents of the valley were subjected to eligible of retaining permanent citizenship certificate and enjoy the privileges while being a citizen of the valley. No outsider or even Indian government was eligible to buy or sell property. Under the previous law, if any outsider acquired a land on temporary basis for the purpose of agricultural and industrial use, the owner of the land had power to cancel the agreement without any compensation. Presently, the Indian government introduced 14 new laws in the valley, more than a year after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A. The new laws permit the outsiders to buy or sell property in the valley. Under the new laws, Indian Government has the authority to acquire a land that declares as 'of strategic significance' by the Indian military and also has the discretion to convert any area into a military zone. Significantly, agricultural land is now open to bid for other purposes including industrial development.



## Repealed laws

The Laws that no longer remain effective in Jammu and Kashmir are as follows:

- a) Big Land Estate Abolition Act of 1950: The Act limited land possession to 22.75 acres. Moreover, the land that crossed such ceiling automatically transferred to the cultivator, who was not bound paying compensation to its original owner.
- b) The Jammu and Kashmir Alienation of Land Act of 1938: The law that prohibits the transfers of land in favour of non-permanent resident.
- c) Common Lands (Regulation) Act of 1956: It regulated the rights of common land such as roads, streets, lanes, pathways, water channels, drains, wells, tanks or any other source of water supply to villagers."
- d) Tenancy Act of 1980: It stayed all applications or proceedings relating to ejecting tenants.
- e) The Jammu and Kashmir Prohibition on Conversion of Land and Alienation of Orchards Act of 1975: The law prohibited conversion of land into orchards and prevented the use of existing orchard land for other purposes, without prior government permission, has also been repealed.
- f) The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA), of 2016 – a central law – to the UT: "RERA aimed to protect home-buyers and also boost investment in the real estate industry. It allowed an authority to regulate the real estate sector and also served as an adjudicating body for speedy property dispute resolution."

The former state laws; including "the Jammu and Kashmir Flood Plain Zones (Regulation and Development) Act, the Jammu and Kashmir Land Improvement Schemes Act, the Jammu and Kashmir Prevention of Fragmentation of Agricultural Holdings Act, the Jammu and Kashmir Utilization of Lands Act, and the Jammu and Kashmir Underground Public

Utilities (Acquisition of Rights of User in Land) Act;" have been completely repealed.

### **New Land laws in Kashmir**

- a) Section 17 of the Jammu and Kashmir Development Act of 1970: It allows outsiders to buy and sale property within the valley and omits the phrase "permanent resident of the state" as condition to it.
- b) Section 133-A of the J&K Land Revenue Act of 1996: The law permits everyone to purchase and sale property. Moreover, it opens the use of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes with mandatory permission of state or through payment of conversion fee.
- c) The Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services, Decentralization and Recruitment Act. The Act defines domiciled person as one who has resided in the valley for 15 years or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in 10th or 12th standard examination in an educational institute located in the valley. It also recognizes the eligibility of spouse of a civil servant posted in the UT for domicile.
- d) The Jammu and Kashmir Land Grants Act: The Act omitted a provision that allowed the termination of land lease, without any compensation, if any non-resident was introduced as a promoter or member of a society."
- e) Addition of a new clause in the Jammu and Kashmir Development Act. This new section allows the government, on the written request of an Army officer not below the rank of corps commander, to declare a land as a strategic area for operational and training purposes. The Act now allows the Indian military to deploy troops in an a land marked as 'strategic area' in case of an emergency.
- f) The J&K Industrial Development Act: The Indian government has also set up a new body called the J&K Industrial Development Corporation which permits acquiring land chosen by the government for the purpose of industrial development in the valley.

- g) The provisions of the Indian Forest Act of 1927: “ the law now applicable to the UT as the order substitutes the state law – The Jammu and Kashmir Forest Act.”
- h) By amending the J&K Agrarian Reforms Act, 1970, Ministry of Home Affairs has also “clipped the powers of the Revenue Minister, who could previously overturn an order passed by a Tehsildar or Assistant Commissioner in respect of any evacuees’ land or state land.”

The introduction of two orders-the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Adaptation of Central Laws) Third Order and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Adaptation of State Laws) Fifth Order of 2020- triggered a massive outrage across the erstwhile state. Leaders across the valley called it a “dictatorial move” and betrayal by India. Such measures of the Modi regime are being looked with suspicion for making demographic alterations through settlement of Hindu Migrants in Jammu and Kashmir. Since, it is a fact that J&K is the only Muslim majority state within India. Therefore, Modi’s Kashmir policy is a strategic doctrine that rules out any expected anti-India outcome in a possible plebiscite that has been demanded since 1947 by the United Nations in its multiple resolutions as well as the regional stakeholders in order to secure the right of self-determination of one of the most oppressed population of the Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Implications for IIOJK (in the context of law fare)**

History is a tangible testimony India landed its troops in Srinagar on October 27, 1947 illegally occupied the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The accession of Kashmir was totally against the whims of the people of Kashmir. Alistair Lamb, a renowned British historian in his classic book titled “The Birth of Tragedy” writes that prior to the signing of the accession the continued resistance by Kashmiris after the partition demonstrates that Indian troops invaded the Kashmir.<sup>32</sup> Alistair Lamb, further reiterates that Maharaja was unwilling to sign the instrument of accession nor did

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<sup>32</sup>“Lawfare Options Against Indian Occupation of IIOJK,” *Pakistan Observer*, October 24, 2020, <https://pakobserver.net/lawfare-options-against-indian-occupation-of-iiojk/>.

instrument of accession exist by virtue of that Indian government was reluctant to unveil the documents to international forum. Resistance against oppression is a law of nature; people of Kashmir will fight till their last breath against the occupation of Kashmir.<sup>33</sup>

Arguably, Pakistan fights for the cause of Kashmir in every international forum. Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan by raising legal points in his speech in September 2020 at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) embarked the path to a new opportunity by highlighting war crimes being committed by Indian occupational forces at International Court of Justice (ICJ) International Criminal Court (ICC) and other legal forums and get them punished. Hassan Aslam Shad, a well-known international law firm argued that “Lawfare is the use of law as a weapon of war. Lawfare is achieving the same or better results as warfare but without firing a bullet. PM Khan’s speech was as brilliant reiteration of his UNGA address on 26 September 2019 where he opposed warfare and made a call for global peace”.<sup>34</sup>

India is thoroughly oblivious to the ramifications of the abrogation of article 370 and 35 A for regional stability. Gross human rights violation by BJP government in Kashmir and ethnic cleansing of Muslims and changing demographic Muslim majority in Jammu and Kashmir will have server implications and will further exacerbate the ties of two arch-rivals India and Pakistan. Kashmir’s annexation is illegal under international law. India has violated Article 42 of the Hague Regulations 1907, by occupying Kashmir, the article states that “territory is considered occupied when it is placed under the authority of the hostile army”<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi while highlighting the implications of Indian brutalities in IIOJK said that was an alarming sign for international order as the usefulness of the post-World War II international structures was eroding by leaps and bounds and further reiterated that “This world is more uncertain, less predictable, and for these reasons,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Lawfare: Pakistan’s Options for Kashmir,” *Kashmir Media Service*, October 23, 2020, <https://kmsnews.org/news/2020/10/21/lawfare-pakistans-options-for-kashmir/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

perhaps more dysfunctional. The buffers and support systems of international organisations and international law that helped buttress the post-Second World War growth and prosperity may no longer deliver desired outcomes,”<sup>36</sup>

Shireen Mazari, Human Rights Minister of Pakistan, on the other hand, said annexation of Kashmir and altering of its demography were ostensibly war crimes. She warned the international community of growing implications of an appeasement policy towards BJP government and compared it with Hitler's regime when Germany was appeased by the great British. Appeasement makes aggressor more aggressive. International community's appeasement towards Modi government is likely to repeat the episode of World War II.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

It is a fait accompli; India has undergone an unprecedented surge of far-right extremism. South Asian region, due to RSS ideology witnesses right-wing nationalism, the ideology based on promotion of Hindu superiority suppressing the minority groups. RSS ideology in Indian foreign policy is based on violence and expansionism poses a grave threat not only to Pakistan but also disturbing the stability of the region. August 05, 2019, is the darkest day in history of occupied Kashmir when article 370 and 35A was abrogated by fascist Modi government. August 5, 2019, steps are designed to alter Kashmir's demography converting Muslim majority into minority. Modi is following into steps of Israel altering Kashmir's demography. New domicile law in Kashmir by and large will have grave consequences for the Kashmir. In order to change the mindset of Kashmiri youth, young men are being jailed, tortured and brainwashed to change their stance on self-determination. Modi needs to inculcate into mind that resistance is law of nature. People of Kashmir will resist till their last breath against the oppression of India.

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<sup>36</sup> “World Urged to Adopt Pakistan's Roadmap to Resolve Kashmir Issue,” *The Express Tribune*, August 17, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2259968/world-urged-to-adopt-pakistans-roadmap-to-resolve-kashmir-issue>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter No. 8

# India-China Conflict in Ladakh: What is at Stake?

Asad Ullah Khan\*

### Abstract

The stand-off between India and China in Galwan valley raises questions about the Indian aggression on its neighbours and threat to regional peace and stability. In early days of May 2020, in response to the Indian military structures building the Ladakh valley Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) reacted along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) by a justifies move of moving troops on the border. According to Delhi's claim, the PLA movement is not a routine exercise; however, China thinks that, India has changed facts on the ground. As of October 2020, soldiers from both militaries have clashed on several occasions in Ladakh. The aim of this paper is to analyze in detail the PLA's movement and Chinese interests in the Galwan valley and the factors that pushed the Chinese forces to secure the region. The paper will also assess the Indian aims and objectives regarding this particular conflict in the region. The paper concludes that although this is not a routine face to face conflict, however, it will not gear up to full-scale war.

**Keywords:** Conflict, War, India, China, Border management.

### Introduction

There are three fronts at which China and India are facing the disputes over the border claims. First is the eastern front of Arunachal Pradesh which covers an area of around 90,000 square kms, second is the territory near Nepal, the third and the most important one is the western front in Leh and Aksai Chin covering

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the strategic area of 33,000 sq. kms.<sup>1</sup> The border disagreements between the two states since their inception in 1947 and 1949 have damaged their bilateral ties and have resulted in full scale war in 1962 and several occasional standoffs between the two neighbours. The difference between both the states has damaged the ties on every front whether it is political or economic in nature.

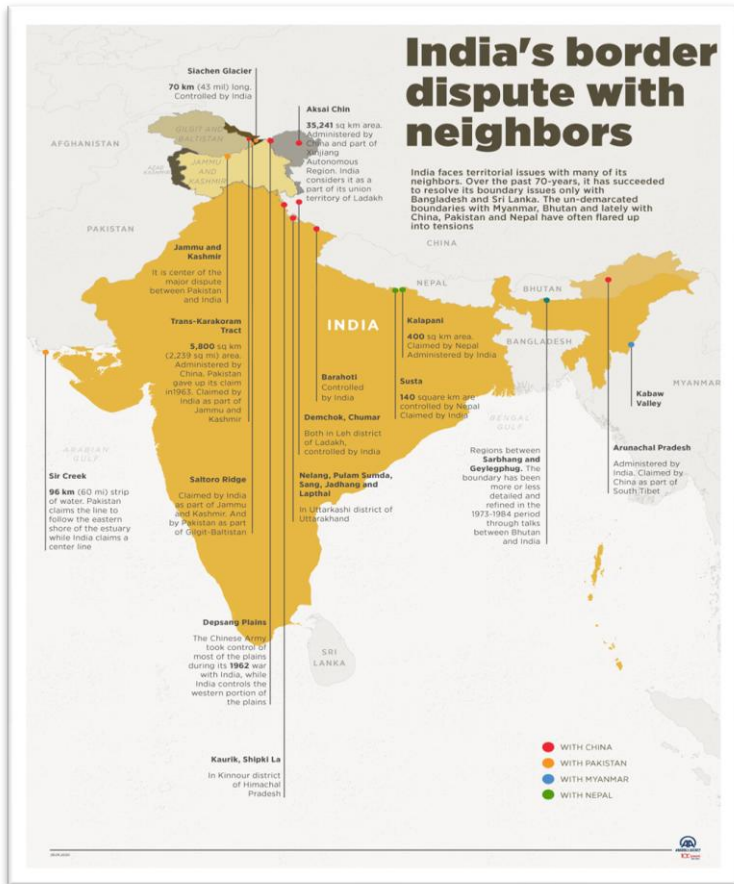
The two regions of eastern sector and western sector are of immense importance when we analyse the conflict. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Tawang district is of symbolic and religious importance for China because of the birth of 6th Dalai Lama in this particular district. Hence, the Indian claim over it is not acceptable for China in any case as this will give an impression that Dalai Lama was Indian and will further undermine the Chinese sovereignty and claim over the Tibet region. The issue in the western sector is more of a strategic nature. The only connection between Xinjiang autonomous region and Tibet autonomous region is the National highway G-219 and the Aksai Chin offers this strategic road, which means any claim on Aksai Chin by India will disconnect China from the autonomous regions.<sup>2</sup> Losing Aksai Chin to India will create a strategic vacuum on China's entire western front. In this backdrop, the main question that needs consideration is how will this conflict between the two states impact the geo-politics of the region?

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<sup>1</sup> Iftikhar Gilani, "India's border dispute with neighbours," *Anadolu News Agency*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/indias-border-dispute-with-neighbors/1859854>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

Figure No. 1



Source: Anadolu News Agency (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/indias-border-dispute-with-neighbors/1859854>)

The aim of China to build infrastructure on its side of the border since 2016 was to enhance its strategic and technical capability. In this regard, the major strategic factor was to pursue its 13th five-year plan. In its 13<sup>th</sup> five-year plan, China aims to develop its border areas for the improvement of its deprived regions.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> "China's 13th Five Year Plan: the land of opportunity," King & Wood Mallesons Law Firm, April 14, 2016,



main objective is to improve the living standard of the people by bringing economic and social development in the border areas.<sup>4</sup> This plan is considered to be the final call for border areas to build a well-off society and ensure internal cohesion. One may say that this plan will enhance regional connectivity by improving the road networks in border areas through civil-military fusion strategy. Through this particular strategy, both civil government and military (because of harsh terrain) cooperate with each other in building infrastructure and connectivity projects to enhance state's capacity for transnational networking.

**Figure No. 2**



Source: King & Wood Mallesons Law Firm  
(<https://www.kwm.com/en/au/knowledge/insights/china-13th-5-year-plan-key-points-summary-new-normal-innovation-20160414>)

According to President Xi Jinping's foreign policy objective, the most important element is of using the infrastructure in the border areas for the purpose of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and expanding this use to global infrastructure projects to expand

<https://www.kwm.com/en/knowledge/insights/china-13th-5-year-plan-key-points-summary-new-normal-innovation-20160414>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Chinese connectivity around the globe.<sup>5</sup> The standoff on 05 May, 2020 in Ladakh between China and India shows that the road construction in the region, whether it is under aim of enhancing BRI capability or tactical advantage, is a bone of contention between the two states. Similarly, the 2017 Doklam crisis was also because of the infrastructure development in the border region but was handled wisely by both the states.

There is more space present for advancement, alterations and capturing territory in the western sector on the China-India border. In eastern sector, the military control in the territory can be traced back to 1950's and there is very less ambiguity on the control of the territory as the presence of the armies from both sides ensured the Line of Actual Control (LAC) must be followed. In the western sector, the harsh weather and terrain is one of the main reason that armies from both China and India vacate the area in winters and then come back in summers which make it easy for Indian side to make advancements as China is unable to station troops permanently.<sup>6</sup> The factor of harsh weather and rough terrain and then non-permanent control of the Chinese troops in the area are the reasons why western sector of India-China border is always in limelight and disputed as compared to the eastern sector.

### **Ladakh Border Standoff**

The current standoff of May 05, 2020, in Ladakh was basically on two points having different implications for the region. First was on Pangong Lake in Ladakh where the issue was of more strategic quest in nature. Both the states were trying to capture the strategic hills which are of significance to control the area.

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<sup>5</sup> "How Will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China's Interests?," *China Power Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 30, 2020, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative/>

<sup>6</sup> "Galwan Valley: China and India clash on freezing and inhospitable battlefield," *BBC News*, June 17, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-53076781>

Figure No.3:



Source: Jeff M. Smith Research Fellow, South Asia, The Heritage Foundation, Twitter Account

In military terms, the strategic hills in the Pangong Lake area are denoted by Finger 1 to 8.<sup>7</sup>



Source: The Print (<https://theprint.in/opinion/no-chinese-occupation-geolocated-images-show-fast-in-and-out-intrusions/433209/>)

<sup>7</sup> Prabhask K Dutta, "India-China border dispute: Importance of Pangong Tso and why its fingers are much sought after," *India Today*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/india-china-border-dispute-pangong-tso-fingers-1685382-2020-06-04>

On May 12, 2020, Unlike Doklam crisis, this time Chinese soldiers started moving towards finger 4 where Indian border posts were located. China claims line is up to finger 2 which is currently under control of Indian armed forces. However, India claims that Indian territory is up to finger 8 which is under PLA control.<sup>8</sup>

In this whole scenario, it is pertinent to mention here that strategically, the most important hill is finger 6 which not only gives bird's eye view of the area but also has ability to give passage to the military vehicle travelling from either side to turn around while they are moving between the fingers 8 to 1. Therefore finger 6 is of more importance to PLA while military vehicles are on the move in the valley.

The PLA while on the move from finger 8 can spend considerable amount of time in their own claimed line of actual control without any detection by Indian side, therefore Indian side decided to move further in the valley by establishing its post on the finger 8 as per its claim on LAC. This shrewd move of India to gain tactical advantage and to change the status quo in the region was not acceptable to Chinese on any terms and condition. In order to counter Indian advancement, China effectively perceived the coming threat and started advancement in the area to capture strategic position as per rules of LAC which effectively stated that LAC is not a demarcated physical boundary; rather the physical control by the troops will determine the position of LAC.

Hence, India is trying to secure the strategic position at the Pangong Lake as its defence line is weak on the Chushul approach to the lake. This Chushul approach had previously turned the table in 1962 India-China war in favour of China. India is trying its best to secure this approach.<sup>9</sup>

### Issues in Galwan Valley

The issue in the Galwan Valley also involves both political and strategic dimensions hence making it more complex conflict in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ismail Vengasseri, *1962 Border War: Sino-Indian Territorial Disputes and Beyond* (Sage Publications Pvt., 2020), 8.

nature. As compared to Doklam crisis in 2017, this time it was the Indian road construction which added fuel to the conflict. Indian Border Road Organization (BRO) aims to enhance India's military capabilities in the region by constructing border roads along LAC. Recently, The BRO was in the business to construct a 255 km long road famously known as Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road with an idea to provide smooth access to Indian military movement along LAC.<sup>10</sup> Another aim which has more political strings attached to it was to connect this particular road to Karakoram Pass connecting Pakistan and China. While realizing the Indian covert aims of reaching to Aksai Chin and Xinjiang through Karakoram Pass, Chinese intervened to halt further construction of 6 km long patch towards Karakoram Pass.

The importance of DSDBO road can be determined from the fact that it has an air landing strip on which Indian army can land C-130 airplanes to keep the military supply line open for its soldiers in the region. To counter Indian military hegemonic designs, China decided to deploy around 5000 troops in the western ridge of Galwan Valley so that it may respond to any Indian aggression if the conflict escalates.<sup>11</sup> One of the major political aims of India to access Karakoram Pass by building a bridge on Shyok River through the extension of DSDBO road was also detected by Chinese efficiently. This was an Indian attempt to contain Chinese connectivity and global infrastructure projects.

### **US Involvement as a Catalyst to the Dispute**

The rising graph of US-India ties even before Ladakh issue is a matter of concern not only for China, but also for other neighbouring countries like Pakistan. The Indo-Pacific strategy drafted by the US after the Doklam crisis clearly shows how US

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<sup>10</sup> Shashank, "India to complete the construction of strategic Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road in Ladakh," *Op India*, June 20, 2020, <https://www.opindia.com/2020/06/india-to-complete-the-construction-of-strategic-darbuk-shyok-daulat-beg-oldie-dsdbo-road-in-ladakh-by-year-end-read-details/>

<sup>11</sup> Meia Nouwens, "Understanding the military build-up on the China-India border," *IJSS*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.ijss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/china-india-border>

wants India to lead its role in Asian political cloud.<sup>12</sup> The elements of power in the form of assistance, alignment and support granted by US to India will make the situation more complex rather than balancing the ties between the two neighbours. Therefore, in post Doklam crisis China has laid a special focus on the Indo-US factor in India-China relations.

China has realized from the Indo-US nexus that the threat from the US military at sea and Indian military in Ladakh and Indian Ocean is a potent threat after growing strategic and security cooperation between US and India. Ladakh crisis is a clear message from China to US-India strategic partnership. China is attempting to secure its justifiable strategic position by pushing back the bond of the two strategic partners who are attempting to disturb the strategic balance of the region. Chinese policy experts are more worried about the substance of the growing relations between US and India.<sup>13</sup> Chinese experts are viewing Indo-US cooperation more from the lens of Indian dependency upon US. Although US will be cooperating with India in terms of defence collaboration, arms sale and intelligence sharing, but this cooperation will somehow impact the Indian autonomy as later on there will be no exit from such institutionalized cooperative mechanisms.

It must be observed that the benefits offered to India by the United States have pushed it to take bold diplomatic and military adventures against Pakistan and also, an assertive posture is observed even in negotiation with Chinese in Ladakh. China is working actively to neutralize Modi's policies of promoting Hindu nationalism which was recently strengthened by the India's illegal change of status of occupied Jammu and Kashmir and controversial laws like new land laws and citizenship law. Similarly, China is also well-versed with the on-going radical domestic politics in India. China is more worried about the domestic ethno-religious conflicts in India which can spill over across the border disturbing its immediate neighbours whether it is China, Pakistan or other

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<sup>12</sup> Imran Malik, "US Indo-Pacific strategy and India," *The Nation*, June 30, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/30-Jun-2020/us-indo-pacific-strategy-and-india>

<sup>13</sup> Pranshu Verma, "In Wake of Recent India-China Conflict, U.S. Sees Opportunity," *The New York Times*, October 3, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/03/world/asia/india-china-trump.html>



countries of the region.<sup>14</sup> However, it must be noted that in the recent past, nothing has changed in China-India relations after the Doklam crisis, and the experts are predicting the shock absorption of Ladakh crisis in the same manner.

### **Implications for the Region**

The changing equation of the cooperation between US, India, Pakistan and China has changed the policy options for conflict resolution in the South Asian region. Indo-Pacific strategy has further complicated the situation as hostility is embedded in the China-India relations although China is trying to normalize the relations. The new regional equation has been shaped in the form of Indo-US block and China-Pakistan friendship.

In the current scenario US, is reshaping its larger policies towards crisis management in the South Asian region. The mediatory role of China in India-Pakistan conflict resolution is now less likely to be possible because of US involvement. Any win for India in South Asia will be a loss for China. After the crisis in Ladakh, China will be more inclined to enhance its strategic position vis-a-vis India, however, its policy of neutrality cannot be ignored considering the bilateral relation of India and Pakistan.

In the past, China has played a constructive role in mediation on different conflicts between India and Pakistan. This was to ensure the balance of power between Pakistan and India. However, the real beneficiary of this balance was India as this balancing was giving more strength and favour to India than to Pakistan. From now, after Ladakh standoff, China will energize the connectivity projects in the region through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan. Similarly, China will also consider more options to infusing the economic cooperation. More options may include direct support in the domain of strategic security partnership with Pakistan.

It must be noted that the change in Chinese response to conflict management in South Asia do not aim to create or expedite any

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<sup>14</sup> Azeem Ibrahim, "Modi's Slide Toward Autocracy," *Foreign Policy*, July 20, 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/13/modi-india-hindutva-hindu-nationalism-autocracy/>

conflicting situation in South Asia. Similarly, analysing the recent situation, China's strategic priorities are prevalent in the West Pacific; moreover, its strategic culture and previous trends are based more on a reactionary mode, which makes the involvement of China in any deliberate conflict very less likely. Traditionally, China has always tried to mediate the conflicts between India and Pakistan diplomatically. However, with the changing political and strategic alliances in South Asia, China will act defensively in its future policies.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

China's investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has also increased China's stake in the Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan region. Part of the former 'Silk-route', Gilgit-Baltistan is China's gateway to the economic corridor and subsequently the Arabian Sea. India, however, questions the propriety of these infrastructure projects on the grounds that Gilgit-Baltistan is a disputed territory and thus Pakistan cannot unilaterally sign trade agreements over it. This is also precisely why India refused to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. India's notorious activities, such as the heavy presence of its troops in the Siachen region or the construction of the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road just 10 km away from Aksai Chin are seen as potential tools to offset CPEC and consequently, harm the economic interests of both China and Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> As proof of China's stake in the issue, it has responded by heavily patrolling the (Line of Actual Control) LAC while also building its military outposts in the region.

The recent crisis in the Galwan Valley is also a testament of China's territorial sovereignty and its stake in CPEC. With the PLA (People's Liberation Army) deploying more soldiers East of Siachen in the Galwan Valley and possible support from Pakistani forces from the West in Gilgit-Baltistan, China is well-positioned to sandwich the Indian forces in the strategically crucial Siachen Glacier. Such a two-front war is a real possibility given that the Pakistani armed forces and the PLA have been conducting joint

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<sup>15</sup> Great Game India, "Chinese Preemptive Strike at Galwan Valley To Stall India's Border Road Project," *Great Game India*, June 17, 2020, <https://greatgameindia.com/india-china-clash-galwan-valley-ladakh/>.



combat training exercises called the *Shaheen* exercises and the *Warrior* exercises in the Siachen region since 2011.<sup>16</sup> India has repeatedly complained about Pakistan's alleged militant activities in Kashmir to FATF (Financial Action Task Force) and Pakistan will not risk launching intelligence or military operations in the region by itself because of repercussions from organizations like FATF. However, if Pakistan's "all-weather friend" and CPEC partner, China, is the one initiating the aggressive stance and deploying troops then both Pakistan and China can achieve their aims without any effective backlash.

China's foremost aim is to protect the ambitious CPEC project and it is indeed true that a localized war in Northern Ladakh or even just the presence of Chinese troops would provide protection to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor from any Indian intrusion and keep a check on Indian Army's use of the DSDBO road. It would also prevent India from actualizing its long-standing goal of unifying Gilgit-Baltistan with Indian Occupied Kashmir. China's second aim would be to push India to abide by the 2018 Wuhan consensus whereby both parties informally agreed to "cooperate with each other." China cites a long list of instances where India has reneged on that agreement, but now China has the leverage to coerce India into revoking the new constitutional status of Ladakh. Should India agree to these demands, the PLA can start withdrawing its troops from the region but the roads and defences on the Chinese side will remain on the ground as a reminder of what China is capable of doing if India repeats the August 5, 2019 decision. China's recent developments in the Galwan Valley have not only asserted its own control over the regions in Aksai Chin and other disputed territories but have also made India's claim and control over illegally occupied Jammu & Kashmir and particularly Ladakh more tenuous and costly.

## Conclusion

Despite Indian elevation of conflict to an unprecedented level, China's distrust of Indian political and military leadership is deep

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<sup>16</sup> Pravin Sawhney, "Here's Why All's Not Well for India on the Ladakh Front," *The Wire*, June 10, 2020, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/heres-why-alls-not-well-for-india-on-the-ladakh-front>.

and justifiable. Both the neighbouring states have deep-rooted historical issues. Similarly, the interests of both the nations are incompatible in nature which makes the chances of conflict resolution very less any time soon. However, China's role in stabilizing the relations is a positive development for the political and strategic posture of China. Both the states are in the race of becoming a regional power whereas; the potential only lies on the Chinese side. The regional arrangements between the two states will determine their conflict resolution timeline. Efforts to address the endogenous frictions in the form of border disputes are the only way to normalize the relations between the two neighbours. However, the majoritarian government in India, rising Hindutva and Indian domestic populism are the main hurdles in the way of any peaceful settlement over Ladakh stand-off between China and India.

## Beyond Balakot: Growing Indian Hostilities Towards Pakistan and the Future of Stable Regional Order

Mahwish Hafeez\*

### Abstract

The year 2019 saw a sharp decline in otherwise already tense India-Pakistan relations. Triggered by a suicide attack on a convoy of Indian security personnel, both India and Pakistan once again found themselves on the brink of war. Pakistan's peace gesture of releasing the Indian pilot also did not help much. But then, this was election time and knowing the fact that anti-Pakistan rhetoric is a guaranteed recipe for success, it was hoped that once elections are over, the relationship will be back to normal especially because Pakistan made repeated overtures to India. Unfortunately, this did not happen as the following months saw India taking its anti - Pakistan stance to an altogether new level. Emboldened by its convincing victory for the second term, the Modi government in complete disregard to all international and bilateral agreements and the promises it made to the Kashmiri people, illegally re annexed Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir by abrogating Article 370 and 35 A. India did not stop there as threats of invading Pakistan's Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan areas were hurled at all levels. New map, showing Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit - Baltistan area as Indian territories were issued, and suggestions were made to change India's nuclear No First Use policy. Driven by its Hindutva ideology, India has also taken a very aggressive posture towards its other South Asian neighbours. Be it Nepal or Bangladesh, the heat of Indian belligerence is being felt throughout the South Asian region. Hence India, being the biggest country of the region, instead of taking a lead role in the development and prosperity of South Asian countries has actually been acting as a bully in the region.

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**Keywords:** Kashmir, Nuclear, Media, Region, Gilgit-Baltistan.

## **Background**

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections held in 2014, when Modi rose to power promising to adopt a more muscular policy towards Pakistan, the relations between the two countries have been continuously deteriorating. This happened despite the fact that during election campaign, BJP election manifesto and Modi himself had stressed on giving priority to India's relations with its neighbours and energizing SAARC. The slogan was 'Neighbourhood first'. The invitation extended to all South Asian heads to attend Prime Minister Modi's oath taking ceremony raised many hopes in the region. However, all such hopes were short lived as soon, India's relations with its neighbours, particularly Pakistan started to deteriorate.

Not only the bilateral dialogue remained in limbo, but any effort to normalise relationship also met with severe resistance by the right-wing Hindu parties. The incidents of throwing black ink on the face of a prominent BJP leader Sudheendra Kulkarni for trying to help Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshed Mahmood Kasuri to launch his memoir in India<sup>1</sup> or attack on the headquarters of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in October 2015 and raising hateful slogans by the activists of Shiv Sena against Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Shaharyar Khan who was in India in an effort to revive sports ties are just few examples of how attempts of peace were met.<sup>2</sup> Even Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) office in New Delhi was stormed by the members of Bajrang Dal in January 2016.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Khurshid Kasuri's book launch: Black paint smeared on Sudheendra Kulkarni's face," *Times of India*, October 12, 2015 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Khurshid-Kasuris-book-launch-Black-paint-smeared-on-Sudheendra-Kulkarnis-face/articleshow/49317737.cms>

<sup>2</sup> "Shiv Sena activists storm BCCI HQ over Shaharyar - Manohar meeting," *Dawn*, October 19, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1214126>

<sup>3</sup> "Bajrang Dal activists attack PIA office in New Delhi," *The News International*, January 14, 2016, [https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/90301-Bajrang-Dal-activists-attack-PIA-office-in-New-Delhi+com%2FYEor+\(Latest+News+%7C+thenews.com.pk\)](https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/90301-Bajrang-Dal-activists-attack-PIA-office-in-New-Delhi+com%2FYEor+(Latest+News+%7C+thenews.com.pk))

It was during the first term of Modi regime that even SAARC lost whatever little efficacy it had as on the pretext of a terror attack in Uri, India refused to be part of the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit that was to be held in Islamabad in 2016. Unfortunately, some other South Asian countries like Bangladesh and Afghanistan also decided against joining the summit and ultimately, the summit had to be called off.<sup>4</sup>

It was in this backdrop that the Pulwama incident took place. On 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2019, a suicide attack on a convoy of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was carried out by an indigenous Kashmiri youth killing at least 40 personnel.<sup>5</sup> As has always been the case, without any investigation, India started blaming Pakistan. The subsequent war hysteria that was created by the Indian ruling elite as well as the Indian media almost brought the two countries to the brink of war as after 48 years, India and Pakistan engaged in aerial battle. Pakistan, in a gesture of peace and friendship decide to release the Indian pilot who was captured after his plane was hit in a dogfight with Pakistan Air Force. It was hoped that this gesture will not only ease the military tension but will also help in resumption of the bilateral talks once the new government is in place in New Delhi after the elections which were due in few months' time. The following months saw a barrage of aggressive statements once the election campaign started in India and the hostility continued even after the Modi government assumed power for its second term.

Hence this paper seeks to analyse Pakistan's relations with its eastern neighbour in the second term of Modi government. The paper tries to answer question on how real is the threat posed by India to Pakistan and what is the impact of Modi's policies on regional peace and security.

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<sup>4</sup> "Saarc summit in Pakistan postponed after member states pulls out," *Dawn*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1286684>

<sup>5</sup> "Kashmir suicide attack kills dozens of Indian security forces," *Aljazeera*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/14/kashmir-suicide-attack-kills-dozens-of-indian-security-forces>

## The Election sloganeering or glimpse of Hindutva mindset?

The post Balakot months saw India gearing up for its upcoming 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. As has always been the case, anti-Pakistan rhetoric was the main election theme particularly for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which flaunted its military standoff with Pakistan with huge exaggeration. In fact, the anti-Pakistan rhetoric had started even before the Pulwama incident. For example, while addressing the annual PM's National Cadet Corps rally, Prime Minister Modi had said that the Indian Armed Forces will "not take more than a week to 10 days to make Pakistan bite the dust."<sup>6</sup>

Such was the level of hostility that the Indian Prime Minister even went to the extent of declaring intention of using nuclear weapons. While Addressing a rally in Rajasthan on April 21, 2019, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that strategic experts always warn that Pakistan is a nuclear power and went on to say that "What do we have then? Have we kept our nuclear bomb for Diwali."<sup>7</sup>

The Indian Minsters also declared their intentions of stopping river waters to Pakistan. Taking to his Twitter account, India's Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari said that "Our Govt has decided to stop our share of water which used to flow to Pakistan. We will divert water from Eastern rivers and supply it to our people in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Arjun Meghwal, Indian Minister of state for water resources announced that "0.53 million acre-feet water has been stopped from going to Pakistan

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<sup>6</sup> "India won't take more than 10 days to make Pakistan bite dust : PM Narendra Modi," *Indian Express*, January 29, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-wont-take-more-than-10-days-to-make-pakistan-bite-dust-pm-narendra-modi-6240127/>

<sup>7</sup> "Have we kept our nuclear bomb for Diwali, asks Narendra Modi," *Hindu*, April 22, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/have-we-kept-our-nuclear-bomb-for-diwali-asks-narendra-modi/article26905408.ece>

<sup>8</sup> "India threatens a new weapon against Pakistan's : war," *New York Times*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/21/world/asia/india-pakistan-water-kashmir.html>

and has been stored. Whenever Rajasthan or Punjab needs it, that water can be used for drinking and irrigation purposes.”<sup>9</sup>

While this Pakistan bashing continued in India, Pakistan was hoping that once the elections are over and the new government is in place, both countries will ultimately come to the negotiating table and the dialogue process will be resumed. Pakistan was proved wrong. Subsequent days showed that having won the elections with greater majority (as compared to the previous elections), the 2<sup>nd</sup> term Modi government felt even more emboldened by the election results and saw it as an endorsement of his policies. Hence, it went ahead and took most controversial and illegal decisions that will have far reaching implications on the stability and security of this region.

### **Abrogation of Article 370 & 35A**

The Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir became the first casualty of the second term of the BJP under Modi. Months after assuming power, the Modi government in pursuit of its fascist agenda, announced the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019. The BJP had been aiming for this move for quite some time and in fact this was also included in their election manifesto for the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. However, what BJP could not do in its first term, it found itself in a much comfortable position, owing to the massive victory in 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections, to go ahead with its plans.

This move was in complete disregard to all international and bilateral agreements and the promises made to the people of Kashmir. Worst, it was done in a most brutal manner. Some 180,000 fresh troops were sent to Kashmir to join already stationed 7000,000 troops. A curfew was put in place and a complete blackout of all sorts of communications was enforced. On top of that, prior to the announcement of revocation of the two Articles, Modi government arrested the entire Kashmiri leadership that included pro-India leaders and put them under house arrest or were sent to jail. Hence, Kashmiris were left voiceless.

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<sup>9</sup> “India stops eastern rivers water,” *The News*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/442274-india-stops-eastern-rivers-water>

With complete blackout on all sorts of communications and curfew imposed, the Kashmiri people were deprived of their basic right to protest this brutality. The continuous curfew and lockdown also resulted in shortage of food and medical supplies. Some 4,000 youths, including minors were taken into custody.<sup>10</sup>

On top of revoking the two Articles, the state of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir was also bifurcated into two different Union territories i.e. Union territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Laddakh. All these steps practically meant that India once again illegally and forcefully annexed the state of Kashmir.

It is pertinent to mention here the importance of these two Articles for the Kashmiri people. Under Article 370, the Indian occupied Kashmir enjoyed a certain level of autonomy as it had its own flag and constitution and its own laws. While on the other hand, Article 35A ensured that the Kashmiri state subjects were the sole beneficiary of all the benefits and privileges like jobs, scholarships, and health care among many more. The Article 35A also ensured that only the state subjects were eligible to procure and possess immovable property. Non state residents, even if they were Indian citizens could not claim these benefits. With the revocation of this article and Indian illegally occupied Kashmir becoming a Union territory, all such benefits have also gone.

### **New domicile Law**

Though on surface, the Modi government said that the motive behind revocation of the Articles 370 and 35A was to bring Indian occupied Kashmir and Kashmiris in the mainstream. But in reality, there are very sinister and dangerous plans behind these proclaimed well intentioned steps. Following its dream of creating a Hindu Rashtra, where minorities, particularly Muslims have no place or are treated as second grade citizens, the Modi government in reality intends to change the demography of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir by encouraging Hindus from across India to permanently settle there. This fear was confirmed rather much

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<sup>10</sup> “ About 4,000 people arrested in Kashmir since August 5: govt sources to AFP,” *The Hindu*, August 18, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/about-4000-people-arrested-in-kashmir-since-august-5-govt-sources-to-afp/article29126566.ece>



sooner when on March 31, 2020, the Indian government introduced through an executive order the “Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (adaptation of state laws) Order 2020.”<sup>11</sup> The clauses regarding domicile that were defined under “Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralization and Recruitment) Act stated that those who resided in IloJK for a period of 15 years or students who spent 7 years in IloJK and appeared in class 10 or 12 examination will be eligible to become permanent residents of the state. Further, children of Central government officials who have served in IloJK for 10 years will also be able to take advantage of this Act. Hence, the worst nightmare of the Kashmiri people is turning into a reality as now outsiders can also claim all benefits that were previously reserved exclusively for the genuine Kashmiri people. Since March 2020, at least 18,52,355 people have been granted domicile certificates.<sup>12</sup> Those granted domicile certificate also includes Gurkha soldiers from Nepal serving in the Indian Army.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Jammu & Kashmir new Land Laws**

As far as buying property in IloJK is concerned, while it had become obvious that anyone from across India after acquiring domicile certificate and becoming permanent resident will be able to buy property and settle permanently in the state. But on this particular point, the Modi government has gone one step ahead. It was on October 27, 2020, that the central government through a 111-page gazette notification called the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of Central Laws) Third Order, 2020 amended Jammu and Kashmir Land laws and removed the condition of permanent state subject to purchase land.<sup>14</sup> Now even outsiders can buy land in Kashmir. Omar Abdullah, former chief

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<sup>11</sup> “Amid Coronavirus Lockdown, Govt Comes Up With Domicile Law For Jammu And Kashmir”, *Outlook*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-govtcomes-up-with-domicile-law-for-jammu-and-kashmir/349830>

<sup>12</sup> “Jammu and Kashmir government issues 18.52 lakh domicile certificates,” *Wire*, September 22, 2020, <https://thewire.in/government/jammu-and-kashmir-govt-issues-18-52-lakh-domicile-certificates>

<sup>13</sup> “Residency law in India-held Kashmir amplifies demographic fears,” *Dawn*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1572680>

<sup>14</sup> “J&K's new land laws: A massive attack on rights of Kashmiris?,” *Quint*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/jammu-kashmir-new-land-laws-bjp-government-rights-of-kashmiris-domicile-rules-political-outrage>

minister and leader of National Conference has rightly taunted the move as “J&K on sale” and that the centre has done away with “even the tokenism of domicile.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Indian Belligerence towards Gilgit Baltistan & Azad Kashmir**

While the Modi government is furthering its agenda in IloJK, it also turned its attention towards Pakistan’s Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan region. Open threats that India will now take back Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan from Pakistan were hurled. Soon after abrogating the especial status of IloJK, India’s home minister Amit Shah said in the Parliament that “Kashmir is an integral part of India... When I talk about Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin are included in it.... we will give our lives for this region.”<sup>16</sup>

While addressing a public meeting in Surat, the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said “If there will be talks (with Pakistan), it will be on PoK”<sup>17</sup> and again said “The next dialogue will be about terrorism and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and nothing else.”<sup>18</sup> Union Minister Jitendra Singh insisted that “After this historic step, let us move forward with a positive thinking of freeing PoK from the illegal occupation of Pakistan and making it an integral part of the country in accordance with the unanimously passed resolution in Parliament (in 1994).” “Let us pray that we see the integration of PoK with the country and people freely visit Muzaffarabad.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Jammu & Kashmir put on sale: Omar Abdullah slams centre for amendment in land laws,” *Indian Express*, October 27, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jammu-kashmir-land-laws-amendment-omar-abdullah-6902386/>

<sup>16</sup> “The internal drivers of China’s Ladakh offensive,” *Hindustan Times*, October 3, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/the-internal-drivers-of-china-s-ladakh-offensive/story-dnbFa9lQZvOGcEwCkIIBIM.html>

<sup>17</sup> ““Talks with Pakistan now only on PoK” Says Defence Minister Rajnath Singh,” *NDTV*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/talks-will-be-on-pok-says-rajnath-singh-after-pak-needles-india-on-jammu-and-kashmir-2086715>

<sup>18</sup> “Pakistan will fall apart unless it stops terror aid: Rajnath Singh,” *Indian Express*, September 15, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pakistan-will-fall-apart-unless-it-stops-terror-aid-rajnath-singh-5996313/>

<sup>19</sup> “Let’s move forward, free PoK from Pakistan, says Union Minister Jitendra Singh,” *Outlook*, August 19, 2019,

The then Army chief General Bipin Rawat in an interview did not shy away from hiding India's nefarious designs and said "The next agenda is retrieving PoK and making it a part of India. The government takes actions in such matters. The institutions of the country will work as per the orders of the government. The Army is always ready."<sup>20</sup> General Bipin Rawat also said that "When we say Jammu and Kashmir, the complete state of Jammu and Kashmir includes PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan... PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan become an occupied territory – a territory which has been illegally occupied by our western neighbour." He further said "it is not controlled by the Pakistani establishment. It is controlled by the terrorists."<sup>21</sup>

Needless to say, that all such statements actually betrayed the mindset of the current Modi regime and was a matter of deep concern for Pakistan. It clearly indicated that India was in no mood to normalise its relations with Pakistan. These statements showed that Modi government was very much willing to put the peace and security of the region at stake for the sake of its own political agenda. It also showed that India has not learned any lesson from its February 2019 military standoff with Pakistan.

### **Invoking nuclear threat and suggestions of reviewing NFU**

Since India officially announced its "No First Use" (NFU) policy in 2003, the hawkish Indian strategists and retired military officers had been expressing their reservations. Thus, in 2014, when BJP geared up for its election campaign for the 16th Lok Sabha elections, it also included in its election manifesto a pledge to "Study in detail India's nuclear doctrine, and revise and update it, to make it relevant to challenges of current times."<sup>22</sup> Soon afterwards, on number of occasions, India kept on expressing its desire of changing its nuclear policy. The Defence Minister during Modi's

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<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-lets-move-forward-free-pok-from-pakistan-says-union-minister-jitendra-singh/336598>

<sup>20</sup> "Troops ready, govt to decide on PoK: Army Chief," *India Today*, September 12, 2019

<sup>21</sup> - "Army Chief says PoK is illegally occupied, is run by terrorists," *Indian Express*, October 26, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/army-chief-says-pok-is-illegally-occupied-is-run-by-terrorists-6088483>

<sup>22</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party Election Manifesto 2014, for full text visit [bjp.org](http://bjp.org)

first term Manohar Parrikar quite candidly expressed this thinking saying “Why a lot of people say that India has No First Use policy. Why should I bind myself to a... I should say I am a responsible nuclear power and I will not use it irresponsibly.”<sup>23</sup>

Just days after India’s most brutal and illegal step of re-annexing Kashmir, the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in an effort to present India as a stronger and more muscular country hinted at changing India’s NFU policy. “Till today, our nuclear policy is ‘no first use’. What happens in future depends on the circumstances,”<sup>24</sup> was Rajnath Singh’s assertion. It is being speculated in certain circles that Modi government’s upcoming National Security Strategy will put the final nail in the coffin of the NFU policy.<sup>25</sup>

### **Role of Indian Media in creating war frenzy**

Repeated incidents have now proven beyond any doubt that to a large extent, Indian media is also responsible for putting the peace of the region at stake. This same tendency was seen immediately after the Pulwama suicide attack took place. Before any Indian government agency could conduct even a preliminary investigation, the Indian media was seen beating the war drums. Not only “300 terrorists” were claimed to be killed but those killed also included cleric Abdul Rasheed Ghazi<sup>26</sup> during the air strikes that were carried out by Indian Air Force on Pakistan’s Balakot region. Now, the entire world knows that cleric Abdul Rasheed Ghazi had lost his life in 2007 during the Lal Masjid operation in Islamabad whereas, the claim of killing 300 terrorists also fell flat as Pakistan allowed the foreign media and all Defence Attaches to visit

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<sup>23</sup> “Manohar Parrikar questions India’s no-first-use nuclear policy, adds ‘my thinking’”, *Indian Express*, November 11, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/manohar-parrikar-questions-no-first-use-nuclear-policy-adds-my-thinking-4369062/>

<sup>24</sup> Toby Dalton, “Much Ado About India’s No-First-Use Nuke Policy,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 26, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/26/much-ado-about-india-s-no-first-use-nuke-policy-pub-79952>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> “Indian media blames slain Rasheed Ghazi for Pulwama,” *The News*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/433248-indian-media-blames-slain-rasheed-ghazi-for-pulwama>

the site and see for themselves the Indian lies. The hawkish nature of Indian media can be gauged by a statement of one of the leading Indian anchor-person who said “we want revenge, not condemnation; it’s time for blood, the enemy’s blood.”<sup>27</sup> Another was seen wearing army fatigue and brandishing a toy gun.<sup>28</sup>

In November 2019, a reputed Brussels-based NGO, the EU DisinfoLab released a report exposing 265 bogus media outlets in 65 countries that were managed by an ‘Indian influence network’.<sup>29</sup> This network was specifically designed to malign Pakistan in EU and the UN particularly regarding Kashmir. This whole network also helped India in advancing its narrative on its illegal August 5, 2019, re-annexation of Indian occupied Kashmir. Besides policymakers, these fake media outlets also targeted the local population of EU countries with anti-Pakistan propaganda. The Indian media has also been portraying any political activity as anti-Pakistan movement in Gilgit-Baltistan. Recently, Indian media also made itself a joke when it made headlines about an imaginary “civil war” in Karachi where war broke out between Pakistan Army and Police and as a result, many people lost their lives.<sup>30</sup>

The relentless anti-Pakistan bashing and spreading fake propaganda against Pakistan by Indian media cannot be seen in isolation. This Indian media certainly acts as a propaganda machine for the government. The situation becomes even more dangerous considering the fact that the present dispensation in India can use this medium to up the ante against Pakistan and create war hysteria, or even creating hatred among the common people of the

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<sup>27</sup> Sagarika Ghose, “Anchor Anger: Hello TV anchors, which way to the newsroom, sorry, war room please?,” *Times of India*, March 11, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/bloody-mary/anchor-anger-hello-tv-anchors-which-way-to-the-newsroom-sorry-war-room-please-f0-9f-98-9c/>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> “Uncovered:265 Coordinated Fake Local Media Outlets serving Indian interests,” *EU DISINFO LAB*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/uncovered-265-coordinated-fake-local-media-outlets-serving-indian-interests>

<sup>30</sup> “Mass hysteria as Indian media relentlessly covers imaginary war in Pakistan,” *TRT World*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/mass-hysteria-as-indian-media-relentlessly-covers-imaginary-war-in-pakistan-40792>

two countries whenever there is a need - mostly due to internal compulsions.

### **Implications for the region**

Almost seven years down the lane, it is now clear that Modi's "Neighbourhood first" was only a slogan and never a real intention. Following its goal of creating a Hindu Rashtra and emboldened by the US support, India is acting as a hegemon in the region where it is only Pakistan that has and is resisting this hegemony. Today, because of India's hostile and belligerent policies, the entire South Asian region stands at a crossroads.

On the diplomatic front, the India - Pakistan relations saw downward trend following the February 2019 events. Once, the elections were over and Modi returned to power with astounding majority, Pakistan hoped that the relations between the two countries would now be back on track. Unfortunately, this did not happen despite Pakistan's repeated overtures. Following India's illegal re annexation of Kashmir, Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic ties with India and decided not to send its ambassador designate to India and asked Indian High Commissioner to leave the country. Pakistan also decided to suspend trade ties with India. Following months saw incidents of diplomats being harassed or detained on espionage charges culminating in India asking Pakistan high commission to cut short its staff by 50 percent.<sup>31</sup> Pakistan followed the suit.<sup>32</sup>

In Kashmir, the Indian policies have cast dark clouds over the South Asian region. Known as the nuclear flash point and cause of two full scale wars between India and Pakistan, the August 5, 2019, steps of India have taken the conflict to an entirely new level. Now, Kashmiris not only have to raise their voice for the sake of right to self-determination but will also have to rise up to protect their

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<sup>31</sup> "India asks Pakistan High Commission to cut staff strength by 50%," *Times of India*, June 24, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-asks-pakistan-high-commission-to-cut-staff-strength-by-50/articleshow/76531714.cms>

<sup>32</sup> "38 Indian High Commission officials leave Pakistan amid diplomatic row", *Geo News*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/295737-38-indian-high-commission-officials-leave-for-india-amid-diplomatic-row>

religious and cultural identity and also their land from being encroached by non-Kashmiris. Further, the massive human rights violation committed by India pose a serious threat to the peace and tranquillity of the region.

Worst, India is not confining its belligerence to IloJK. It is now casting an evil eye towards Pakistan's Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan region too. India has long been opposing the development projects that Pakistan initiated in Azad Kashmir - be it the Diamer-Bhasha Dam or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Recently In a very provocative move, India started showing weather forecast for Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit - Baltistan regions on its national broadcasts in an effort to imply that these are Indian territories under Pakistan's occupation.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the recent Sino-India border conflict is a prime example of India's intentions. This standoff between India and China was a result of India's infrastructure building in a strategic location from where it could pose security threat to not only China's BRI-CPEC project but also Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan area.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, the hostilities on the Line of Control saw new heights. Mostly targeting the civilians, the ceasefire violations by India resulted in 59 people losing their lives that included women and children whereas some 281 people sustained injuries in 2019.<sup>35</sup> In the first eight months of 2020, India has committed more than 207 violations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "DD, Air show weather reports from Gilgit-Baltistan from today, officials say more reports to follow," *Economic Times*, May 8, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/dd-air-show-weather-reports-from-gilgit-baltistan-from-today-officials-say-more-reports-to-follow/articleshow/75621900.cms>

<sup>34</sup> Asad Ullah Khan, "China-India border standoff: An overview," Issue Brief, *Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad*, June 12, 2020, [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IB\\_Asad\\_Jun\\_12\\_2020.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IB_Asad_Jun_12_2020.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> "Indian violations claimed 59 lives along LoC in 2019," *Dawn*, January 1, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1525564>

<sup>36</sup> "Senior Indian diplomat summoned to register Pakistan's strong protest over ceasefire violations by India," Press Release 344/2020, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad*, August 20, 2020, <http://mofa.gov.pk/senior-indian-diplomat-summoned-to-register-pakistans-strong-protest-over-ceasefire-violations-by-india-17/>

Similarly, in yet another provocative move, on November 2, 2019, the Indian government issued its new political map.<sup>37</sup> This new map not only showed IloJK as union territories but also showed Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as Indian territories. This forced the Pakistani government to issue its own new political map showing IloJK and Siachen (both illegally occupied by India) as its part.<sup>38</sup>

As if provoking Pakistan was not enough, this said Indian map also showed Nepal's territory of Lipulekh and Kalapani as its own, prompting a strong response from Nepal. This situation further deteriorated following India's inauguration of a road linking Dharchula in Uttarakhand state to Lipulekh, as part of the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route. Lipulekh and Kalapani is a territorial dispute between India and Nepal since 1816 when the border between the two countries was delineated by the Sugauli treaty signed between the British East India Company and the King of Nepal following the Anglo-Nepalese war. The Sugauli treaty clearly states that Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura belong to Nepal. However, India has been occupying these lands and refuses to find a negotiated settlement of the dispute.<sup>39</sup> Hence, Nepal was also left with no choice but to release its own political map.<sup>40</sup> It is worth mentioning here that the memories of economic blockade are still fresh in the minds of Nepalese people. Such provocative steps by India only act as fuel to the fire and does not in any way help in bridging the mistrust between the South Asian countries.

Apart from its belligerence towards neighbouring countries, what is more worrisome is that, India's internal situation has also

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<sup>37</sup> "Government releases new political map of India showing UTs of J&K, Ladakh," *Times of India*, November 2, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/govt-releases-new-political-map-of-india-showing-uts-of-jk-ladakh/articleshow/71867468.cms>

<sup>38</sup> "PM unveils new political map of Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, August 4, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2257952/pm-unveils-new-political-map-of-pakistan>

<sup>39</sup> Brabim Karki, "Amid dispute with India, Nepal publishes new political map : What now?," *Diplomat*, May 22, 2020, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/05/amid-dispute-with-india-nepal-publishes-new-political-map-what-now/>

<sup>40</sup> "Nepal parliament approves new map that includes land India claims," *Aljazeera*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/18/nepal-parliament-approves-new-map-that-includes-land-india-claims>



started to create problems for the neighbouring countries. In recent times, Bangladesh, which has traditionally enjoyed cordial relations with India, particularly under the government of Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina, has also started to feel the heat of Indian policies. There is a growing anti-India sentiment among Bangladeshi people due to internal Indian policies like National Register of citizens, Citizenship Amendment Act, and February 2020 anti-Muslim riots in Delhi. India recently concluded National Register of Citizens which aimed to identify illegal immigrants. For most Indians, these illegal immigrants are Bangladeshis. Those, whose names have not been included in the register and who happens to be a Muslim has now only two options; migrate to a neighbouring country or spend the rest of the life in detention centres. Bangladesh now fears that these Muslims might now be crossing over to Bangladesh. Though, India has repeatedly assured that Bangladesh will not be in any way affected by the NRC but all such assurances have failed to satisfy the Bangladeshi government or the general public as already there are reports of people migrating to Bangladesh from India due to fear of persecution.

It was in this backdrop that the Bangladeshi government extended an invitation to Indian government to attend celebrations of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman's birth centenary. This invitation led to massive Protests by the right-wing parties, students, and members of the civil society that erupted prior to Modi's visit. As the protesters were demanding that Bangladesh withdraws its invitation to Modi, ultimately, Modi postponed his visit under the pretext of Covid-19.<sup>41</sup> There were also reports in the media that the Bangladesh's Prime Minister was not responding to the requests by the Indian High Commissioner to present his credentials, though later, the Bangladesh government clarified that it was not due to deterioration in ties but only because the Bangladeshi Prime Minister is not meeting anyone due to Covid outbreak.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ali Riaz, "Modi's cancelled Bangladesh visit is an opportunity," *Atlantic Council*, March 10, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/modis-cancelled-bangladesh-visit-is-an-opportunity/>

<sup>42</sup> "Bangladesh denies reports of PM Sheikh Hasina avoiding meeting with Indian envoy," *Economic Times*, July 29, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/bangladesh->

Bhutan and Maldives have also suffered at the hands of India. The diplomats from Bhutan cannot attend any social or official event without prior permission from India's Ministry of External Affairs. In Maldives, India has been playing a role in making and breaking the governments.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, India's external as well as internal policies have put the peace and stability of the region at stake. There is not a single country in South Asia which has or is not suffering at the hands of India. This is particularly true since Bharatiya Janata Party under Narendra Modi assumed power in 2014. What is more unfortunate is that, instead of taking note of Indian policies and its intentions, the world community, particularly the United States is encouraging India by signing agreements like the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). Since both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers, ensuring peace is a global responsibility. By encouraging India and providing it with the most sensitive weapon systems is not in anyone's favour.

## Conclusion

It seems from the above discussion that one country, i.e. India has held hostage the entire region. The past more than six years of Modi government have proved that India has absolutely no intention of normalising its relations with Pakistan. Not only India refuses to engage in a meaningful negotiations, it has now created an environment where even Pakistan has backed off from expressing its desire of resuming dialogue. While India is busy in supporting terrorism in Pakistan's Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions, it wishes Pakistan to be blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The arrest of Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadav is the biggest proof of Indian subversive activities in Pakistan.

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denies-reports-of-pm-sheikh-hasina-avoiding-meeting-with-indian-envoy/articleshow/77236169.cms?from=mdr

<sup>43</sup> Asif Durrani, "Why India is a bully to its neighbours," *Daily Times*, July 23, 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/644637/why-india-is-a-bully-to-its-neighbours/>

Emboldened by the US to act as a counterweight to China, India feels that it can play God in the region. While the smaller countries of the region have more or less towed the line, it is Pakistan which has and will always resist Indian hegemony. Hence, for India, Pakistan is the only hurdle in realising its goal in the region.

The past six years of Modi regime also suggest that Pakistan in no way should take Indian threats of invading Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan lightly. The world has seen that Modi has acted upon all his promises which no other government or political party could ever dream of. Whether it was abrogating Articles 370 and 35A, reducing the Indian occupied Kashmir to Union Territories or building Ram Temple, Modi has put his words into action. It is also evident that whenever Modi government finds itself in any kind of difficulty internally, it tries to divert the public attention by upping the ante against Pakistan. Hence, the possibility of a false flag operation by India and blaming it on Pakistan is very much real and requires Pakistan to be alert at all times. Besides, a false flag operation with blame on Pakistan would also serve India's purpose to get Pakistan placed in the blacklist of FATF. Thus, Pakistan has in the past warned the international community of this possibility and it needs to continue doing it. Also, Pakistan should try to work closely with other South Asian countries and take them on board regarding India's hegemonic designs.

## Chapter No. 10

# False Flag Operations: Indian New Normal

Dost Muhammad Barrech\*

### Abstract

The term false flag operation has been gaining considerable significance in contemporary international politics, in which the actor purposefully misrepresents and blame the adversary for the incident. False flag operations are intentionally conducted by states to misguide the common people about the real perpetrators. Such fabricated operations are carried out by the actors to justify their aggression. The actors can carry out a series of operations or could restrict their actions to a single event. Indian false flag operations, in this regard, are based on a series of events, externalizing its internal problems, diverting the world's attention from atrocities being carried out by India armed forces in Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK), detracting public attention from the political, economic and social crisis of India, portraying Pakistan as a terrorist state. India, under the Modi regime, confronts innumerable challenges such as economic slowdown, growing polarization, mistreatment of the minorities. The environment is rife for Modi's government to conduct further false flag operations to blame Pakistan for its atrocities in (IOJK) and growing Indian internal conundrum. The paper will assess Indian false flag operations in the past and will evaluate false flag operations in a theoretical framework and will critically analyse the factors that compel Indian statecrafts' to go for false flag operations.

**Keywords:** false flag operation, attacks, diverting public attention, surgical strikes, disinformation campaign.

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## Introduction

The term false flag operation has been gaining considerable significance in international politics. States carry out false flag operations and blame their adversaries for the incidents. The term 'false flag' operation has been derived from operations at sea, where ships raise a false flag to camouflage themselves and conceal their original identity. False flag operation can be defined as, "A covert operation designed to deceive; the deception creates the appearance of a particular party, group, or nation being responsible for some activity, disguising the actual source of responsibility."<sup>1</sup>

The real objective behind conducting such operations is to misguide the public about the real culprits. Statesmen go for such operations to justify their aggression against the rival state. The operation sometimes can have a single or a series of deceptive incidents depending on the state's long-term objectives.<sup>2</sup> The Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was accused of possessing weapons of mass-destruction (WMD), when North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) waged a war on Iraq, they could not discover WMD, and the episode of WMD subsequently perpetuated in the global war on terror.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, the possibility of false flag operations in South Asia by India has become an alarming issue for the region. Indian under the Narendra Modi government has become a hegemonic state that is now adopting such tactics in its ambition to carry out aggression against its neighbours. A recent example has been its air strikes inside Pakistan in early 2019 in Balakot. The reality of those operations was aimed at diverting world's attention from its atrocities in Illegally Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK). The government and the military in Pakistan have been cautioning and calling attention to such attempts by India in future. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on numerous occasions has unequivocally stated that India would try to conduct false flag

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<sup>1</sup> Tauqir, "Indian False Flag Operation," *Center for Global & Strategic Studies Islamabad*, <http://cgss.com.pk/paper/pdf/indian-false-flag-operations.pdf> (Accessed on November 25, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

operations inside its own territory and Kashmir and would accuse Pakistan of supporting terrorism.<sup>4</sup> President of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi too has cautioned Modi's government saying that, "any attempt to carry out a false flag operation in Kashmir will be met with an equal and befitting response."<sup>5</sup>

Major General Babar Iftikhar, Director General Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) had asserted that, "India was preparing another 'false flag operation' to target Pakistan in an attempt to divert international attention from its troubles at the Line of Control (LoC) with China and the coronavirus management."<sup>6</sup> He reiterated that Pakistan had allowed international media and UN military observer groups to visit Kashmir, and added that India was reluctant to allow them to examine the location, where an explosive-laden vehicle was destroyed and the incident was linked to Pakistan. He too warned India, "Let's not play with fire here."<sup>7</sup>

## **Indian False Flag Operations in Historical Context**

### *a) 1971 Airplane Hijacking*

A false flag operation is an important tool in the Indian foreign policy that has been systemically used since 1971, when the Indian spy agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) on January 30, 1971, conducted a false flag operation by hijacking its Fokker aircraft named Ganga from India to Lahore.<sup>8</sup> The Indian government alleged the Kashmiri freedom fighters Hashim Qureshi and Ashraf Butt, as the hijackers of Indian airplane. New Delhi without any tangible proof accused Pakistan of hijacking the airplane. The main objective of India behind hijacking its Fokker

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<sup>4</sup> Syed Irfan Raza, "India may conduct false flag operation, says Imran," *Dawn*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1557912>.

<sup>5</sup> "Any False Flag Operation by India Will Be Met with an Equal Response: President," *The Nation*, May 8, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/08-May-2020/any-false-flag-operation-by-india-will-be-met-with-an-equal-response-president>.

<sup>6</sup> "Pakistan Military Says India is Preparing for 'false Flag Operation'," *Arab News* June 4, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1684696/pakistan>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Sabir Shah, "History of False Flag Indian Operations Dates Back to 1971," *The News*, February 27, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/437337-history-of-false-flag-indian-operations-dates-back-to-1971>.

aircraft was to halt Pakistani airplanes flying from East to West Pakistan.<sup>9</sup>

It was subsequently unveiled by India officials that the airplane Ganga was dysfunctional and made functional only one day before the incident of hijacking was plotted. India remained successful by conducting false flag operation, the ban on Pakistan's flights from East to West Pakistan on Indian airline compelled the latter to take a longer route via Colombo, Sri Lanka, caused recurrent delays in supply for the Pakistani forces that resulted in disintegration of Pakistan in two parts, and East Pakistan emerged as current Bangladesh.<sup>10</sup>

#### *b) Godhra Train Burning*

The shocking incident of Godhra train burning took place on February 27, 2002, at Godhra station in Gujarat. The train Coach S6 was set on fire in which 59 Hindu pilgrims charred to death and 27 victims including 27 women and 10 children remained wounded.<sup>11</sup> It is pertinent to mention here that when the Godhra train burning incident occurred, at that time, the current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the chief minister of the Gujarat state. The blazing of train within hours witnessed violent riots across the state. The Centre in 2005 apprised the Rajya Sabha that the riots claimed the lives of 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus, and more than 223 people were reported to be missing and tens of thousands remained homeless.<sup>12</sup>

It was later disclosed that "The Godhra incident and the subsequent communal riots were a state-sponsored conspiracy by the Government of Gujarat in connivance with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its associate organisations to ruin the Muslim community."<sup>13</sup> Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani maintained that

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Express Web Desk, "What is the 2002 Godhra Train Burning Case?," *The Indian Express*, October 9, 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/what-is-godhra-case-gujarat-riots-sabarmati-express-narendra-modi-4881537/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Uday Mahurkar "Godhra Massacre: Forensic Report Come in Handy for Rival Politicians," *India Today*, July 22, 2012,

“The Forensic Science Laboratory report only indicates that there was deeper planning on the part of the attackers in the Godhra incident.”<sup>14</sup> A senior police officer Sanjiv Bhatt in his sworn statement in the Indian Supreme Court alleged Chief Minister Narendra Modi deliberately allowed anti-Muslim riots in the Gujarat state.<sup>15</sup> Sadly, in the communal violence in 2002 more than 1,000 people were killed. Bhatt claimed that “He attended a meeting at which Mr. Modi is alleged to have said that the Hindus should be allowed to vent their anger.”<sup>16</sup>

c) *Samjhauta Express Incident*

Indian extremists on February 18, 2007, conducted a false flag attack on Samjhauta express that killed 68 people including 43 Pakistanis.<sup>17</sup> It was portrayed as if Muslims were involved in the attack. However, a report was later unveiled, claiming that the Indian extremist Kamal Chauhan a staunch follower of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Corp), was involved in the attack. According to NIA, Chauhan was trained in arms and explosives in Haryana, planted the bombs on board the Samjhauta Express.<sup>18</sup>

Another Hindu extremist Swami Aseemanand who also was involved in the Samjhuta express attack confessed before the judicial magistrate. He said that he along with his fellow RSS activists plotted blasts on Samjhauta Express. He further argued that an attack on Samjhauta express was revenge for Muslim militants attacking Hindu temples “I told everyone that a bomb

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<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20020722-godhra-massacre-forensic-report-come-in-handy-for-rival-politicians-794762-2002-07-22>.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> SanjoyMajumder, “NarendraModi ‘allowed’ Gujarat 2002 Anti-Muslim Riots,” *BBC News*, April 22, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-13170914>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Sofi Ahsan, “Samjhauta Express Blast Case Explained: Who Are the Accused? What Did NIA Chargesheet Say?,” *The Indian Express*, March 12, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-samjhauta-express-blast-verdict-today-who-are-the-accused-what-did-the-nia-chargesheet-say-5620175/>.

<sup>18</sup> Jawed Naqvi, “Hindu Extremists Bombed Samjhauta Express,” *Dawn*, February 15, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/695646/hindu-extremists-bombed-samjhauta-express>.



must be responded with a bomb" Aseemanand added.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Pakistan strongly condemned the incident. The Foreign Office of Pakistan termed the incident as "activists of the Hindu terrorist organisation RSS."<sup>20</sup> The Foreign Office of Pakistan further reiterated that "It also belies the rampant Indian duplicity and hypocrisy where India reflexively levels allegations of terrorism against Pakistan, while protecting with impunity terrorists who had publicly confessed to their odious crimes."<sup>21</sup>

#### d) Mumbai Attack

Blaming Pakistan for terrorist attacks in India without solid proof has become a norm in Indian foreign policy. However, the world is fully cognizant of Indian false flag operations being conducted by New Delhi attributed to equate Pakistan with terrorism. Though, New Delhi blames Islamabad for carrying out terrorist attacks, when it comes to providing proof to the world community India remains failed to prove its groundless allegations.<sup>22</sup> Terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, killing nearly 160 people jolted entire India. The Indian government tried to portray Pakistan as a perpetrator of the accident, but ground realities reflected that India itself was involved in conducting the Mumbai attack.

A German author Elias Davidsson, in his classic book "The Betrayal of India: Revisiting the 26/11 Evidence" raised valuable points regarding Mumbai attack<sup>23</sup> He questioned the Indian investigation procedure that lacked public trial, provided no proof of Pakistan's involvement in the incident. Davidsson raised a pertinent question: why was New Delhi reluctant to unveil the role of David Headley –an American-in 26/11, and the concealment of

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<sup>19</sup> "Hindu Extremist Confesses Involvement in Samjhauta Express Bombing," *The Express Tribune*, January 7, 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/100465/hindu-extremist-confesses-involvement-in-samjhauta-express-bombing>.

<sup>20</sup> "Samjhota Express Bombing: India's Special Anti-terror Court Acquits 4 Accused," *Dawn*, March 20, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1470809>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Merwah Hamid Qureshi, "Mumbai attacks: India's false flag operation to deceive the world," *Geopolitica*, December 6, 2018, <https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/mumbai-attacks-indias-false-flag-operation-deceive-world>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the detail of killing of ATS Chief Hemant Karkare? He viewed that New Delhi knowingly suppressed the truth about the incident and the eyewitness adjacent to Nariman House said that terrorists lived in Nariman House for fifteen days. A comprehensive analysis of Davidsson demonstrates that the Mumbai incident was a false flag operation of India to malign Pakistan's image globally.<sup>24</sup>

e) *Uri Attack*

Uri sector of the Indian army battalion headquarters in Jammu & Kashmir was attacked by the terrorists on September 18, 2016. The attack on the Indian army in the Uri killed 17 Indian army personnel and wounded 19.<sup>25</sup> India once again followed a traditional trajectory without proof blamed Pakistan for orchestrating the attack. Pakistan unequivocally rejected the Indian baseless allegations and accused India of playing a double game by misinforming the world community. Sartaj Aziz, an advisor to Pakistan Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs categorically said that "Pakistan has noted with serious concern the recent spate of vitriolic and unsubstantiated statements emanating from Indian civil and military leadership in the aftermath of yesterday's attack."<sup>26</sup> Aziz further reiterated "It is a blatant attempt on India's part to deflect attention from the fast-deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation."<sup>27</sup>

Nafees Zakaria, Foreign Office spokesman of Pakistan maintained that human rights violation in IIOJK was at pick. In order to divert the world's attention from gross violations of human rights New Delhi triggered the Uri attack. Zakaria stressed upon the international community and asked them to "Look at the current situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir, where gross violations of human rights have been perpetrated by Indian

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "India diverting attention from Kashmir: Pakistan on Uri attack," *The Economic Times*, September 19, 2016, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-diverting-attention-from-kashmir-pakistan-on-uri-attack/articleshow/54405820.cms>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

occupation forces on innocent Kashmiris with impunity. This has attracted the attention of the entire world community.”<sup>28</sup>

Zakaria further said that New Delhi had spared no effort to malign the positive image of Pakistan through such incident. Pakistan was also blamed for the Chattisinghpura incident March 2000, Samjhauta Express terrorist attack 2007, Makkah Masjid blast, and the extrajudicial killing of three young Kashmiris in Maachil episode, added Zakaria. However, Indian baseless allegations later proved wrong. The aforementioned incidents were the false flag operations of India to blame Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> Orchestration of Uri attack was a false flag operation of the Modi government designed to associate Pakistan with terrorism and divert the world's attention from the Kashmir freedom movement.<sup>30</sup>

#### f) Pathankot Terror Attack

On January 2, 2016, India's Pathankot airbase came under four days of attacks from terrorists. Indian officials as usual blamed Pakistan for Pathankot's attack. Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), according to the Indian official was involved in the attack. India blamed that (JeM), was supported by Pakistan to launch attacks.<sup>31</sup> Pakistan, on the other hand held India responsible, playing blame game on the Pathankot terror attack. Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar without proof asserted that the terror attack in Punjab's Pathankot was carried out by non-state actors supported by the Pakistani establishment.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, Nafees Zakaria, FO spokesperson of Pakistan, asserted that instead of blame game both Pakistan and India had to cooperate to find the perpetrators. Zakaria expressed that Pakistan had formed a Joint Investigation Team and modalities were being worked out so that they could visit India to probe the

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<sup>28</sup> B. S. Syed, “Uri attack allegations rejected,” *Dawn*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1285524>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> S. Joshi, “Pathankot attack: India-Pakistan peace talks derailed?” *BBC News*, January 7, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35240272>.

<sup>32</sup> “Pakistan accuses India of engaging in blame game over Pathankot,” *The Economic Times*, March 3, 2016, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-accuses-india-of-engaging-in-blame-game-over-pathankot/articleshow/51242581.cms?from=mdr>.

matter.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, Sartaj Aziz, the advisor to Pakistan Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, maintained that “he hopes that in next few days investigation team will visit India and further says that then you would be able to trace the phone calls, who all...The phone call (from India) came to one or two numbers but then their links and the identities of the four people who were killed in the attack are also got to be established yet, as we haven’t got the right photographs or finger prints of those.”<sup>34</sup>

Bringing home, the timing of the Pathankot terror attack is exceedingly important. The attack on Pathankot airbase happened when Modi visited Pakistan in December 2015. The incident also postponed peace talks proposed between the two countries. Warmongers in India were unconcerned with peace talks with Pakistan and the visit of Modi further enraged them. Under such circumstances, false flag operation was on the cards to stall peace talks.<sup>35</sup>

g) *Pulwama Attack*

February 14, 2019, witnessed a suicide bombing at Lethpora in Pulwama district of Indian occupied Kashmir, when a suicide bomber rammed the car into bus killing 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel and left 20 wounded on the spot.<sup>36</sup> India blamed that Pakistan was involved in the incident and threatened a “strong reply,” and announced that New Delhi would revoke Pakistan’s Most Favoured Nation Status.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Desperate India blames Pakistan for Pathankot attack,” *Pakistan Today*, March 1, 2016, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2016/03/01/pathankot-attack-not-possible-without-islamabads-support-alleges-india/>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “40 CRPF jawans killed in worst terror attack in Kashmir, India slams Pakistan,” *Hindustan Times*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/44-crpf-jawans-killed-in-worst-terror-attack-in-kashmir-india-slams-pakistan/story-wCajHcY345jffHufloa4pN.html>

<sup>37</sup> “Modi warns of ‘strong reply’ to Kashmir attack as India withdraws Pakistan’s MFN status,” *Express Tribune*, February 15, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1911036/1-modi-threatens-strong-reply-occupiedkashmir-suicide-attack>

The Pulwama attack just two months before the Indian election keeps one in a quandary, a question remains: who has benefited from Pulwama attack? Realistically speaking, India from the Pulwama attack benefited immensely as the country was going to hold its 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections in April and May 2019. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) mostly wins elections by using anti-Pakistan rhetoric and the party, subsequently, won the election overwhelmingly.<sup>38</sup> The anti-Pakistan rhetoric, on the other hand, also proved fruitful for the BJP government that diverted the attention of people from the mega Rafale fighter jet scandal. Most importantly, India has remained miserably failed in suppressing the Kashmiris who have been fighting for the right of self-determination for the last seven decades.<sup>39</sup>

Ground realities reflect that the Pulwama attack was a false flag operation of India. After the Pulwama attack, it was unveiled within a few minutes that 350 kilograms of an improvised device were used in the incident. So far, no explanation has been provided by the Indian authority that how was it possible to carry such a large number of explosive devices by crossing the Line of Control in the deployment of Indian armed forces? Suffice it to say, Modi achieved his desired goal by conducting a false-flag operation bolstered anti-Pakistan rhetoric and re-elected as Prime Minister of India.<sup>40</sup>

### **Indian disinformation campaign against Pakistan**

Indian obsession with tarnishing Pakistan's positive image globally is deeply embedded in its foreign policy. New Delhi has constantly been trying to equate Pakistan with terrorism; its false flag operations so far bear unfruitful results in convincing the international community to declare Pakistan as a terrorist country. New Delhi has now followed another way of disseminating disinformation campaign against Pakistan. A recent comprehensive

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<sup>38</sup> Mahwish Hafeez, "Pulwama and its aftermath: India on dangerous war path," *ISSI Issue Brief*, March 12, 2019, <http://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-pulwama-and-its-aftermath-india-on-dangerous-war-path/>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> SVI Foresight Report 2019, *Strategic Vision Institute*, <https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SVI-Foresight-Vol-5-No-4.pdf> (Accessed on December 03, 2020).

investigation by a European group discloses that India has been aggressively involved in promoting disinformation against Pakistan.<sup>41</sup>

According to the EU DisinfoLab, disinformation campaign networks the anti-Pakistan media operation in 2005 started by the Srivastava Group in 2005. The 15 years campaign of the Srivastava Group “aims to reinforce pro-Indian and anti-Pakistan feelings in India. Internationally, the campaign envisions improving the perception of India by receiving support from EU and UN organizations and by damaging the reputation of Pakistan.”<sup>42</sup> The Indian chronicles is engaged in anti-Pakistan mission globally. It is pertinent to mention here that “The Srivastava Group was already running reports of fake international media outlets and NGOs against Pakistan to sow seeds of hatred against the country when the Asian News International (ANI), the Indian press agency, joined in. The Srivastava Family created 550 fake online media outlets, from which ANI copy-pasted content.”<sup>43</sup>

The Indian chronicles strengthens Pakistan’s stance of fifth-generation warfare unleashed by the former against the latter. DG ISPR, Maj. Gen. Babar Iftikhar terms the Indian chronicles as a major challenge and views it “Unfortunately, it’s a major onslaught, it’s a major part of the fifth-generation warfare. Pakistan is being subjected to hybrid applications in a massive way and we are aware of that.”<sup>44</sup>

## Indian Surgical Strikes

Surgical strikes are used in military attacks with the aim of military targets, causing collateral damage in adjacent areas and civilians of the rival state. The target of specific areas in the surgical strikes will reduce the likelihood of a full-blown war but will cause a great deal

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<sup>41</sup> Editorial, “Indian disinformation,” *Dawn*, December 11, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595146>

<sup>42</sup> “Indian disinformation campaign against Pakistan,” *The News*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/758216-indian-disinformation-campaign-against-pakistan>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Pakistan being subjected to 5th-generation warfare in ‘massive way’ but we are aware of threats: DG ISPR” *Dawn*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593804>.

of damage to the adversary.<sup>45</sup> A Pakistani prolific writer Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, in his classic book titled "India's Surgical Strike: Stratagem, Brinkmanship and Response" articulates that Indian surgical strikes are aimed at gaining political mileage diverting public attention from internal crisis.<sup>46</sup> The writer argues that Pakistani policy makers are fully cognizant of Indian surgical strikes. In the post-Pulwama attack Pakistan according to Jaspal, purposefully eschewed an escalation with India as Islamabad believed in a nuclear taboo.<sup>47</sup>

Pakistan cautioned the international community that India would conduct surgical strikes. Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mahmood Qureshi said that "I have learned through our intelligence sources and they have picked up this information that India is planning a surgical strike against Pakistan,"<sup>48</sup> "I want to tell India very clearly that Pakistan is fully prepared to respond and to defeat their designs," he added.<sup>49</sup>

### **Indian False Flag Operations in Theoretical Framework**

A theory is vital for comprehension of the social and political phenomenon, giving an accurate direction to apprehend complicated and bizarre social and political issues, providing us answers giving prediction about the political and social issues. As far as the topic titled "False Flag Operations: Indian New Normal" is concerned, the diversionary theory of war is exceedingly applicable to be applied, enabling us to understand the factors behind false flag operations being carried out by India. The diversionary theory of war claims that the statecraft of the country moves towards conflicts, not because of interstate clashes rather state wants to go for war due to problematic domestic

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<sup>45</sup> A. Hashim, "Pakistan alleges India preparing for 'surgical strike'," *Al Jazeera*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/18/pakistan-alleges-india-preparing-for-surgical>.

<sup>46</sup> *Strategic Vision Institute*, <https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/JSSA-Vol-V-No.-2-154-157.pdf> (Accessed on December 11, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> A. Hashim, "Pakistan alleges India preparing for 'surgical strike'," *Al Jazeera*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/18/pakistan-alleges-india-preparing-for-surgical>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

circumstances.<sup>50</sup> Under such delicate circumstances, the leader who faces a fragile economy and political unrest is likely to create a foreign policy crisis by diverting domestic discontent and reinforcing his and her political gains. In the diversionary literature, the use of force is being used for attracting the masses attention diverting them from political, economic and social issues.<sup>51</sup>

The theory further argues that the perpetuation of war is a prerequisite for struggling groups. In this regard, the struggling group will intentionally go for searching enemies to maintain internal cohesion.<sup>52</sup> Simmel explains the crux of diversionary theory of war saying that “a state of conflict, however, pulls the members so tightly together and subjects them to such a uniform impulse that they either must get along with, or completely repel, one another. This is the reason war with the outside is sometimes the last chance for a state ridden with inner antagonisms to overcome these antagonisms, or else break up definitely.”<sup>53</sup> In order to justify the explanation of Simmel, the US presidents get more popularity during the international crises. Resultantly, the diversionary theory of war has been gaining momentum in international politics by leaps and bounds. It is emerging as an important tool for the leaders to trigger a conflict to divert public attention from internal political, economic and social issues.<sup>54</sup>

False flag operations of India can acutely be analysed in the context of the diversionary theory of war. The country is unconcerned with its minorities becoming more aggressive towards

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<sup>50</sup> Jaroslav Tir, “Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict,” *Research Gate*, August 2010, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228214783\\_Territorial\\_Diversion\\_Diversionary\\_Theory\\_of\\_War\\_and\\_Territorial\\_Conflict](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228214783_Territorial_Diversion_Diversionary_Theory_of_War_and_Territorial_Conflict).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Sylvie (Huahua) Zhong, “Diversionary Theory of War: Levels of Domestic Conflict and External Use of Force,” *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research*, no. 9, 2018, <http://research.monm.edu/mjur/files/2019/02/MJUR-i09-2018-Zhong.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen E. Gent, “Scapegoating Strategically: Reselection, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Theory of War,” *International Interactions*, March 11, 2009, [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03050620802497048?casa\\_token=qAritQ2jpdqAAAAA:lNq\\_FAAIrCi7dqYvUEEyz05es-k9eMoplvlgJwsO3m6y0rEos6EfMbVgk30Eu3IJwvvcjX2ry5Nvx8NI](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03050620802497048?casa_token=qAritQ2jpdqAAAAA:lNq_FAAIrCi7dqYvUEEyz05es-k9eMoplvlgJwsO3m6y0rEos6EfMbVgk30Eu3IJwvvcjX2ry5Nvx8NI).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



neighbouring countries. The ideology of Hindutva has turned Indian society into an exploitive society. Indian National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act is overlooking 15 percent of the Indian Muslim population and heading the country towards further polarization.<sup>55</sup> The prevailing demonstration of farmers in New Delhi showcases Indian fragile economy. The environment is ripe for the false flag operations or aggressive foreign policy by the Modi government to externalize Indian internal problems to pacify marginalized and destitute Indians.<sup>56</sup>

It is disgusting to note that, Indian even do not spare a vehicle of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) that was attacked by Indian armed forces on the LOC.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan warned that India would plot a false flag operation as the country's internal problems were mounting. Khan cautioned the international community that if India had gone for a false flag operation, Pakistan would give a befitting response to New Delhi.<sup>58</sup>

### Way Forward to Avoid False Flag Operation

- Modi needs to shun imposing Hindutva ideology that has been converting the world's so-called largest democracy into the world's largest extremist ideology.
- Hindutva ideology will enhance further polarization in India. As extremists do not believe in economic growth, science and technology and will move India towards a quagmire, where New Delhi will be left with the last resort of false flag operations to blame Pakistan for its internal woes.

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<sup>55</sup> Press release – Seminar on “Understanding Hindutva mindset and Indian hegemonic aspirations,” *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, December 16, 2020, <https://issi.org.pk/press-release-seminar-on-understanding-hindutva-mindset-and-indian-hegemonic-aspirations/>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Syed I. Raza, “Pakistan Asks UN to Probe Indian Attack on Observers,” *Dawn*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1596965/pakistan-asks-un-to-probe-indian-attack-on-observers>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

- RSS ideology has captured the Indian society, it is becoming rapidly belligerent and exploitative that would have severe ramifications for the region, paving the way for further false flag operations.
- Modi instead of addressing Indian internal issues will move towards warmongering policies including conducting false flag operations.
- Modi needs to address Indian internal issues so that he should not play a double game with the masses.
- India has to accept the genuine cause of Kashmiris self-determination because of the Kashmir conundrum India conducts false flag operation blaming Pakistan for terrorist attacks.
- Modi ought to address the growing economic woes of India, the country with at -23.9% till June 2020 has been becoming the world's largest contracting economy. He has been unsuccessful in improving Indian economy generating a likelihood of further false flag operations.
- The farmers' protest in India showed that Modi is disinterested in resolving the farmers' issues; he is more interested in protecting the interest of the capitalist class. The environment is conducive for Modi to conduct false flag operations to detract the farmers from the cause.
- India needs to eschew the aspiration of a hegemonic state. The hegemonic gesture has deteriorated its ties with its neighbouring countries.

## Conclusion

Pakistan and India have a bitter history of partition that has been affecting the relationships of both countries even today. New Delhi's relations with Islamabad, under Modi government have further deteriorated; the country has become more belligerent and intolerant. The economic woes of India amid Covid-19 have been accelerating rapidly. Modi has remained failed in addressing political, economic and social issues while Indian relations with its neighbouring countries have also been exacerbating. The prevailing

exacerbating situation is ripe for the false flag operations; Modi is likely to be conducting further false flag operations to gain popularity, as well as to divert Indians attention from their socio-economic issues.

False flag operation is an instrumental tool of Indian foreign policy. History is tangible testimony that Indian false flag such as 1971 Airplane Hijacking, Godhra train burning, Samjhauta Express, Mumbai attack, Uri attack, Pathankot terror attack, Pulwama attack, Indian surgical strikes and Indian disinformation campaign against Pakistan are attributed to divert the world's attention from Kashmir freedom movement, accelerating Indian hegemonic aspirations in the region and assuaging the Indian masses for their internal problems. Through false flag operations, India attempts to link Pakistan with terrorist state, trying to isolate Islamabad globally, diverting the world's attention from Kashmir self-determination, winning the confidence of the marginalized people of India that Pakistan has been engaged in attacking India. Presumably, in the foreseeable future, false flag operations by India are likely to be escalating as the country is engulfed in growing polarization, economic slowdown, farmers' demonstrations, exacerbating ties with its neighbouring countries. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on numerous occasions affirmed that India was going to conduct a false flag operation so that Modi would divert the world's attention from its ongoing genocide in the IOJK.

The Director-General Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Major General Babar Iftikhar also stated that the Indian false flag operation was imminent, and Pakistan was ready for giving befitting response to New Delhi. False flag operations will ostensibly remain an Indian new normal. Hindutva ideology is embarking on the path to the transition of India towards the biggest fascist regime of the world. The ideology is primarily based on hatred, discrimination, and Hindu's superiority. In short, the intensifying influence of the Hindutva mindset in Indian polity will further deteriorate Pak-Indi ties, enhancing the possibility of conducting false flag operations aimed at blaming and isolating Pakistan, diverting Indian public attentions from Indian political, economic and social issues.

## Chapter No. 11

# Pax Indo-Pacific: Implications for Strategic Stability in South Asia

Misbah Mukhtar\*

### Abstract

In order to contain the growing Chinese influence in Asia, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe introduced Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy. The latter was readily patronized by the United States. By analysing the strategies of different regional and global actors towards the term 'Indo-Pacific', this chapter formulates a case about the artificial nature of the concept by claiming that, a) there is no uniform geographical definition of the term Indo-Pacific, and, b) it does not provide a new regional order or strategy for the containment of China. On the other hand, creation of forums like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD has influenced the strategic balance of South Asia. Being a part of QUAD, India is perceived as a crucial player. This chapter further highlights the implications of various developments under the rubric of Indo-Pacific in South Asia. These developments have flexed the naval and military muscle of India instilling a security dilemma in the neighbouring states which can further invite an arms race in the region posing further threats to its strategic stability.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, FOIP, Security Dilemma, South Asia, QUAD.

### Introduction

The emergence of Sino-US rivalry poses various challenges to the world, especially Asia. As the rivalry unfolds itself, it encompasses all domains of regional and international politics from trade policies to security strategies. Let alone entering new

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blocs or leaving the old ones, the Sino-US rivalry shapes and reshapes the landscape of the world. The revival of great power rivalry has brought Asia to the crossroads of a new regional order where growing Chinese influence poses a direct challenge to the continuing US hegemony. Recently, China has risen over the global landscape as one of the largest economies of the world by strengthening itself both on the military and diplomatic front. It has further augmented its influence through its economic ties via Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In this milieu, President Trump readily accepted Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) to cater Chinese influence in the region. Consequently, India, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN also formulated their concept of Indo-Pacific. In Europe, so far, France has its own concept of Indo-Pacific, mainly revolving around protecting its national interests in the region. China, on the other hand rejects it by viewing it as a containment strategy towards itself.

Against this backdrop, this chapter aims at understanding what essentially is entailed by the term 'Indo-Pacific' and whether there is a uniform definition of the concept or not. It further delves deeper to identify what different countries are aiming to achieve while propagating their Indo-Pacific agenda. By analysing the policies of various regional and global actors towards the concept of 'Indo-Pacific', this chapter formulates a case about the Indo-Pacific's artificial nature. It establishes that so far it has failed to provide a revised regional order for the containment of China. Towards the end, the chapter touches upon the developments made under the rubric of Indo-Pacific in South Asia where Quadrilateral Security Group or QUAD plays a significant role in providing a strategic maritime advantage to India. The chapter concludes that India's military and naval agreements are a precursor of a new arms race in the region by unfolding a new security dilemma.

The questions analysed in this chapter include:

- a) What does the term Indo-Pacific mean for different actors?
- b) Is Indo-Pacific a real geographical region or an artificially constructed one?

- c) What are the implications of further developments happening under the term Indo-Pacific for the South Asian region?

### **Indo-Pacific: Conception and Strategies by Different Actors**

#### *a) Japan*

Japan's Prime Minister Abe in his 2007 address explained Japan's conception of Indo-Pacific.<sup>1</sup> Though the term he used was not Indo-Pacific but broader Asia, it was in this speech that he mentioned that broader Asia means the increasing friendship between India and Japan, which would further be enhanced by collaborating with Australia and US.<sup>2</sup> This speech showed that he had already expanded QUAD in his mind by including the entire Pacific Ocean and eastern part of the Indian Ocean.

Gradually, Japan developed its concept of Indo-Pacific. At the start of 2013, PM Abe used both the terms 'Asia-Pacific' and 'Indo-Pacific' together in his Washington address.<sup>3</sup> In the Diplomatic Bluebook of 2017, the Japanese Foreign Minister expressed the desire to use "two continents," i.e., Africa and Asia and, "two oceans" i.e., Indian and Pacific as a collective region. By doing so, he aimed to open a new frontier in Japanese diplomacy, promoting regional peace and development by connecting three continents, i.e., Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It also indicated Japan's plan to increase the expansion of trade, investment, and infrastructure building "from East Asia as a starting point, to the Middle East and Africa."<sup>4</sup>

In late 2017, President Trump and Japanese Prime Minister expressed their resolve of working together in the Indo-Pacific to ensure prosperity in the region. Therefore, in this regard, Japan

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Confluence of the Two Seas, Speech by HE Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan is Back By Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan," February 22 2013, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/us\\_20130222en.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/us_20130222en.html).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, June 2017, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000290287.pdf>.

expanded its Indo-Pacific concept and included the United States in it.<sup>5</sup> Japan has an evolving geographical definition of Indo-Pacific. While addressing the World Economic Forum in 2018, the then Foreign Minister mentioned Indo-Pacific, “from eastern shore of the African continent, through the Indian Ocean, through ASEAN countries, through the Pacific Ocean, to the western coast of the North and South American continents.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, they simultaneously posted a map on their official website, explaining the expansion in the outline of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Its main goal was to strengthen connectivity in the ASEAN region by expanding it to Africa and the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> These new developments indicate that Japan is not looking for a revised regional order based on China's containment and has an ASEAN centric approach in its Indo-Pacific Strategy.

#### b) US

Unlike Obama's Rebalancing Strategy, the term 'Indo-Pacific' gained more momentum under the Trump administration for whom Japan's FOIP held great fascination. Therefore, he readily adopted one for the US. One of the top officials of the Trump administration explained Indo-Pacific as “the entire Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, and the nations that surround them.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2017, Trump officially adopted Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>9</sup> and defined Indo-Pacific as “the region, which stretches

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-US Working Lunch and Japan-US Summit Meeting,” November 6, 2017,

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e\\_000699.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000699.html)

<sup>6</sup> World Economic Forum, “World Economic Forum on ASEAN: Asia's Geopolitical Outlook”, September 13 2018,

<https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-on-asean/sessions/asias-geopolitical-outlook>

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Free and Open Indo-Pacific: What is Free and Open Indo-Pacific? Outline”, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> US Department of State, Remarks by Rex W. Tillerson, Secretary of State, on “Defining Our Relationship with

India for the Next Century”, October 18 2017, <https://www.state.gov/remarks-on-defining-our-relationship-with-india-for-the-next-century/>.

<sup>9</sup> The White House, Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, November 10, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nangvietnam/>

from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States,”<sup>10</sup> in their national security documents. By doing so, the entire Pacific Ocean became a part of US’ understanding of the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report 2019 highlights Indo-Pacific as “the single most consequential region for America’s future.”<sup>11</sup>In FOIP, India enjoys a significant role. This new re-positioning of US around India is due to its heavy presence in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Therefore, US see India as its key partner in the East.<sup>12</sup>

The three main areas in US Indo-Pacific vision include security, economy, and governance.<sup>13</sup> With its Indo-Pacific vision, US have also associated an economic vision based on infrastructural development, energy, and the digital economy. For this reason, in July 2018, US \$113 million fund was announced by US for the expansion of regional economic engagement.<sup>14</sup> A month later, another US \$300 million was announced in the Indo-Pacific economic vision for humanitarian development, to reinforce cooperation in peacekeeping, and to strengthen maritime security, among other things.<sup>15</sup>All these economic investments were primarily aimed at containing China.

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<sup>10</sup> The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017, 46, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, June 1, 2019, 1, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFICSTRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State, Special Briefing by Alex N. Wong, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, on “The Indo-Pacific Strategy,” April 2, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/briefing-on-the-indopacific-strategy/>.

<sup>13</sup> US Department of State, Fact Sheet, “Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region,” November 18, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/advancing-a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-region/>.

<sup>14</sup> US Department of State, Remarks by Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, “on America’s Indo-Pacific Economic Vision,” at Indo-Pacific Business Forum, US Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, July 30, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/remarks-on-americas-indo-pacific-economic-vision/>.

<sup>15</sup> US Department of State, Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesperson, “US Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region,” August 4, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific-region>



c) *India*

In 2015, India released its Maritime Security Strategy. In this strategy, Indo-Pacific was among the key areas of significance for India. It defined it as “the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, through the various Indo-Pacific Straits and South/East China and Philippines Seas.”<sup>16</sup> It primarily places India at the centre of the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, Prime Minister Modi presented a geographical conception of the region by saying that Indo-Pacific was “from Africa’s shores to those of (the) Americas”<sup>17</sup> in one of his speeches in 2018.

India considers growing Chinese influence in its maritime proximity as an encirclement strategy. It is the foremost reason why India has adopted an Indo-Pacific policy to respond to Chinese influence in the maritime areas. India is also concerned about the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and China’s military presence in its maritime proximity. Furthermore, the QUAD countries associated huge expectations with the Indian role in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, it became pertinent for India to formulate a geographical definition of the Indo-Pacific to clarify that by “Indo” in the Indo-Pacific, India meant the Indian Ocean. It must be noted that while mentioning the Indo-Pacific, many QUAD countries refer to the areas of their strategic interests. In this regard, they are looking for countries sharing the same strategic goals. However, India does not position itself in the Pacific Ocean and is reluctant to incorporate into any group to contain China. In this regard, much was expected from PM Modi’s Shangri La address and that he would go against China in it. However, Modi refrained from signalling any such thing. His speech only stressed upon joint or individual collaborations with different countries for a peaceful

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<sup>16</sup> Indian Navy, Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy, *Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) 1.2*, October 2015, [https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_Document\\_25Jan16.pdf](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue,” June 1, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>

region. He categorically mentioned that his friendships were not “alliances of containment.”<sup>18</sup> He further clarified that even India was not looking for a revised regional order based on China’s containment.

Modi’s this speech, which laid the foundational framework of Indo-Pacific by giving a clear geographical definition, leaves Indian options open where it includes both China and Russia in its geographical scope. However, it raises serious question about the purpose and nature of propagating the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ in the first place. If the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ is not a containment strategy even for India, a country with geographical standoffs with China and the one directly affected by Chinese presence in its maritime proximity, then what is it in the first place?

*d) France*

Since France manages remote territories in the Asia-Pacific, its main concerns about the region revolve around security and defence. Therefore, it becomes vital for France to be present in the region. In the official document published in 2018 by the French Department of Defence, they replaced the term ‘Asia-Pacific’ with ‘Indo-Pacific’.<sup>19</sup> By virtue of this document, “Indo-Pacific comprised the Indian, Pacific, and Southern Oceans and formed a security continuum spreading from the East African coastline to the western American seaboard.”<sup>20</sup> The above definition shows that France has a gigantic geographical conception of the term Indo-Pacific. Thus, France includes the Southern Ocean along with the Indian and the Pacific Ocean when defining Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, it must be noted that for France, Indo-Pacific is essentially referred to for security and defence purposes, with no aim or desire for a revised regional order.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> French Republic Department of Defense, France, and Security in the Indo-Pacific, June 8, 2018, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/532754/9176250/file/France%20and%20Security%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific%20-%202018.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

e) UK

So far, UK has not given a clear geographical conception of what it means by the term Indo-Pacific. The Foreign and Commonwealth office's report on "Global Britain" places "new emphasis" on the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>21</sup> The report points out three areas of political influence and economy to revive Britain's global success. These include North America, Europe, and the Indo-Pacific.<sup>22</sup> The report further included India, China, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia along with Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) initiative under Indo-Pacific.<sup>23</sup> Other countries like the Middle East, Latin America, US, Africa<sup>24</sup> were mentioned in different parts of the report. It means that their conception does not necessarily cover the entire two oceans.

UK has already validated the idea of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" in its House of Commons report by the Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2019.<sup>25</sup> However, the report further clarifies that UK does not want a direct military confrontation with China, so its Indo-Pacific strategy should not be mistaken to formulate such an impression. Therefore, for the UK, Indo-Pacific is not a call for containing China or for a revised regional order, but to increase the UK's role in certain regions.

f) *Indonesia and ASEAN*

Indonesia's conception of the Indo-Pacific involves both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans along with the neighbouring countries. In her May 2018 speech, while being in discussion with the US, India, Russia, and Australia, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia declared that the Indo-Pacific is not a containment strategy.<sup>26</sup> It was a clear message from Indonesia on how they perceived Indo-Pacific.

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<sup>21</sup> UK Parliament, Global Britain, Sixth Report of Session 2017-19, March 12, 2018, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmffaff/780/780.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> UK Parliament, China, and the Rules-Based International System, Sixteenth Report of Session 2017-19, April 4, 2019,

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmffaff/612/612.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> CSIS Indonesia, "The Global Disorder: An Indonesian Perspective," May 8, 2018,

In June 2019, ASEAN adopted “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (AOIP).<sup>27</sup> The aim was not to propose new mechanisms of regional dominance or to replace the ones in place but to re-enforce the existing ASEAN centric mechanisms. The official document of AOIP states it as, “a perspective of viewing the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions, not as contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role.”<sup>28</sup>

It clearly shows that ASEAN has a very different concept about Indo-Pacific in its policy areas. It considers Indo-Pacific as a sum of both the Asia-Pacific Region and the Indian Ocean Region rather than considering it a collection of two Oceans. Moreover, its central policy revolves around AOIP, which associates primary significance to the Asia-Pacific while the Indian Ocean has a secondary position. Moreover, ASEAN has focused on an ASEAN centric approach for any regional order and does not aspire for a new order to replace it. It is also crucial to note that even though the AOIP policy uses Indo-Pacific, it does not validate FOIP for ASEAN’S AOIP includes China in it too.

This proves that ASEAN countries prefer an ASEAN-centric order. This further raises serious questions about the forceful and artificial nature of the concept ‘Indo-Pacific’ since ASEAN countries are the key stakeholders in it and are decidedly non-aligned.

*g) Australia*

Australia first mentioned Indo-Pacific in their 2012 White Paper. They defined it, “as a new conception for the Asian region, pointing out that the western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean would come to be considered as one strategic arc.”<sup>29</sup> A Foreign Policy

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVTI7-hoGqw>

<sup>27</sup> Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” June 23 2019, [https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific\\_FINAL\\_22062019.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Government, Australia in the Asian Century White Paper, October 28, 2012,

<https://content.webarchive.nla.gov.au/gov/wayback/20130328232210/http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/white-paper/australia-in-the-asian-century-white-paper.pdf>

White Paper published in 2017, defined Indo-Pacific as a region, “ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia, and the United States.”<sup>30</sup> Many government documents mention free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific<sup>31</sup> –which means that Australia is far from adopting FOIP.

Australia wants to be the leading player in the Pacific region and has taken great interest in it. The Pacific Islands’ security is the motivating factor behind Australia’s growing interest in the Indo-Pacific. It is mainly because the security of Pacific Islands is crucial for Australia’s security. Therefore, under the rubric of Indo-Pacific, Australia aims at collaborating with other partners like Japan and US in the Pacific Islands to advance its own security. Australia considers Indo-Pacific as geographical reference point from a strategic perspective. However, Australia has always considered Southeast Asia a link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It indicates that Australia has an ASEAN centric approach for the regional order and portrays its support for AOIP’s vision. Since AOIP is all-inclusive and does not aim at containing China, the same logic if extended further shows that for Australia, Indo-Pacific is anything but an effort for a new regional order to contain China.

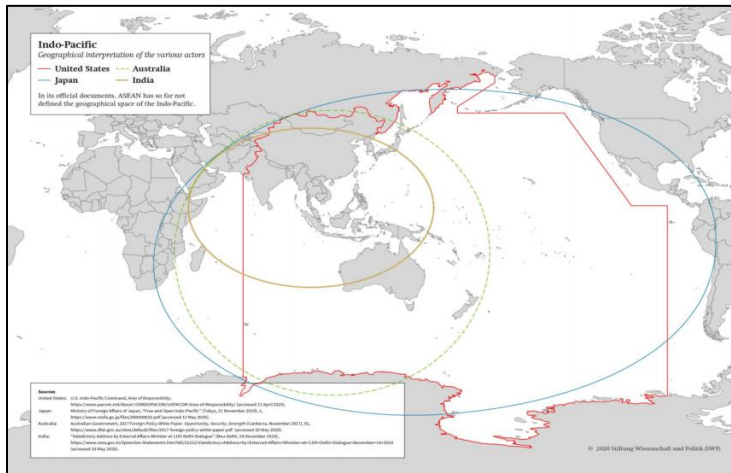
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<sup>30</sup> Australian Government, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, November 23, 2017, <https://www.fpwwhitepaper.gov.au/file/2651/download?token=Q5CYuX29>

<sup>31</sup> Australian Government, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. “Opportunity, Security, Strength,” Accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policywhite-paper.pdf>

The following map shows how different countries geographically perceive Indo-Pacific:

**Figure No.1:**



Geographical Interpretation of Indo-Pacific by Various Actors.<sup>32</sup>

## Indo-Pacific: An Artificial Construct

From the above definitions of Indo-Pacific by various regional and global actors, it is safe to deduce that the term Indo-Pacific does not have a uniform meaning. Moreover, the term inherently fails to present new ideas to contain China. From the above analysis it becomes evident that not a single key player, except the US, aims at a revised regional order in Asia for containing China. The situation is especially crucial for ASEAN countries who aspire to retain an ASEAN-centric regional order and are decidedly non-aligned on the Indo-Pacific strategy promulgated under FOIP. Various countries have their interests at heart and are, therefore, reluctant to pursue US based vision of the Indo-Pacific, for it does not coincide with their national interests. Even Japan, who coined the term Indo-Pacific, does not want to risk its relations with China.

<sup>32</sup> Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, "From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 2020, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020RP09/>

Since 2018, Japan is trying to avoid its FOIP strategy to be assumed as a strategy to contain China. There are two main reasons for this. First, the relations between both China and Japan are not hostile anymore.<sup>33</sup> Second, viewing the Japanese FOIP strategy as containment towards China was excessively criticized by Southeast-Asian countries. Its anti-China orientation towards security policy did not bode well with ASEAN countries,<sup>34</sup> compelling Japan to change its narrative around Indo-Pacific. The change in Japanese stance is viewed in more recent developments where FOIP is now associated with “economic growth, infrastructure expansion,” and “connectivity” as compared to security threats in 2016-17.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Japan now has different outcomes to achieve from its Indo-Pacific strategy, where it no longer prefers modernizing its forces or dealing with issues like the East and the South China Sea with China.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, PM Abe's speech in his Parliament in 2018 pointed out that FOIP and BRI can coexist and complement each other, especially in building infrastructure in Asia.<sup>37</sup> It is undoubtedly the last nail in the coffin of promoting the idea of FOIP as a containment strategy towards China. So far, Japan has not securitized its relations with China. The main reason for this is the growing economic interdependence between the two countries. In this regard, Japan's FOIP's conception is more like revising its old foreign policy, focused on rules-based order. On the other hand, Japan has long been an ally of the US and has enjoyed free trade with it and would like to continue the same without being actively hostile to China. It is pertinent to note that none of these actions are

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<sup>33</sup>Stephen R. Nagy, “Japan's Precarious Indo-Pacific Balance,” *The Japan Times*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/11/14/commentary/japan-commentary/japans-precious-indo-pacific-balance/>

<sup>34</sup>Kei Koga, “Japan's ‘Indo-Pacific’ question: countering China or shaping a new regional order?” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 2020): 57.

<sup>35</sup>Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 196th Session of the Diet”, Tokyo, January 22 2018, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/%2098\\_abe/statement/201801/\\_00002.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/%2098_abe/statement/201801/_00002.html)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 196th Session of the Diet”, Tokyo, January 22, 2018, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98\\_abe/statement/201801/\\_00002.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98_abe/statement/201801/_00002.html)

new or indicate creating a revised order primarily to reduce the Chinese's growing influence.

Moreover, while analysing the Indo-Pacific's real or artificial nature, it becomes pertinent to acknowledge the differences in approach of various actors towards the term itself. For example, the above analysis shows that France's interest in the Indo-Pacific lies on the western part of the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, for Japan and Australia, the Pacific Ocean is of top priority. Meanwhile, the Indian Ocean holds significance for US. For India, the Pacific Ocean is of secondary significance, and for Australia and Japan, the Indian Ocean holds that position. Each nation has, therefore, a different set of priorities in both the oceans. Against this backdrop, the very notion of convergence of interests bringing different nations together under the umbrella of Indo-Pacific becomes a shallow claim. Since each country has a different interest and conception of the term, it only raises further questions about what the term "Indo-Pacific" necessarily mean?

By analysing various state and defence documents of the US about the Indo-Pacific, three recurrent themes could be identified, including offering the regional states an alternative to China's BRI, promoting free and reciprocal trade relations between US and Asian countries, and ensuring the safety of freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. Under these three recurrent themes, it is safe to deduce that US' main intention for FOIP was to formulate a response to increased Chinese influence in the region. In this regard, the FOIP did not create a novel model to contain China but only formulated a reactive concept. It did not even formulate a new US strategy for Asia.

Even in the US, their FOIP neither denied nor affirmed Chinese involvement in it until late 2019. The National Security Strategy published after mid-2019 declared China as an adversary whose aim was to destroy rules based-international order.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, in 2019, it was made clear by the US State Department that

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<sup>38</sup> US Department of Defense, "As Prepared Remarks by Secretary Esper at the German Marshall Fund in Brussels," Brussels, October 24, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/1997187/as-preparedremarks-by-secretary-esper-at-the-german-marshall-fund-inbrussels/>



the US Vision of FOIP was not exclusionary towards any nation.<sup>39</sup> It was further consolidated by the Secretary of Defence in his Hanoi speech declaring that FOIP was inclusive to “all nations including China.”<sup>40</sup> However, towards the end of his speech, he added that China is perceived as an opponent and competitor when it comes to the US vision for the regional order. These contradictory statements and policies indicate that US needs to clarify its rhetoric towards Indo-Pacific first for others to follow it. It is also interesting to note that if FOIP is inclusive for all, it defeats its purpose, i.e., to contain China, and if it is exclusionary, what policies does it suggest for containing China for so far, it has failed to provide any.

Though, there are significant developments in the region, under the notion of Indo-Pacific, including numerous bi, tri, and multilateral agreements between various regional actors; these agreements do not necessarily indicate that their sole motivation is to create a new regional order. The fact of the matter is that even the QUAD countries are currently hesitant to risk their relations with China due to their strategic and economic ties with China.

### **Indo-Pacific and its Implications for Strategic Stability in South Asia**

The rubric of Indo-Pacific has been crucial in formulating various developments in both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This part of the chapter analyses its implications for South Asia's strategic stability, focusing on India and its recent developments, QUAD being the foremost one.

#### *a) Developments under QUAD*

The QUAD has revived since 2017, and the representatives of QUAD countries have met several times to discuss the increased role of QUAD in the region. The figure 2 presents an overview of the Quad meetings since its revival:

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<sup>39</sup> US Embassy and Consulate in Vietnam, “Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper Remarks at Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam,” Hanoi, November 20, 2019, <https://vn.usembassy.gov/secretary-of-defense-mark-t-esper-remarks-at-diplomatic-academy-of-vietnam/>

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

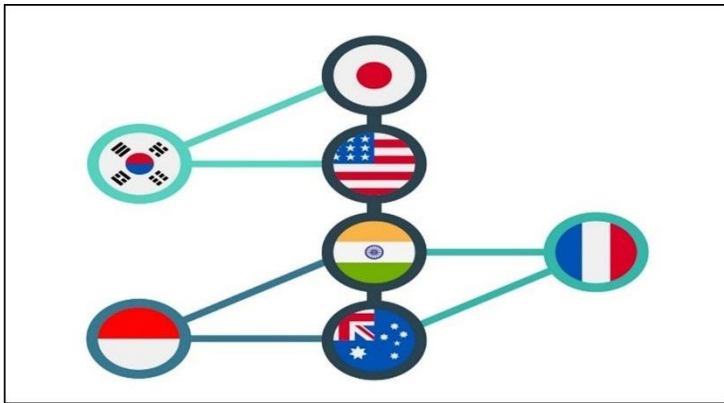
Figure No. 2



The timeline of QUAD meetings (author’s own work).

The QUAD countries have entered various, bi laterals and multi-lateral agreements with each other to consolidate their presence in the region. The figure 3 highlights different agreements entered under QUAD even with countries like South Korea, France and Indonesia:

Figure No. 3



The QUAD countries and their tangled agreements (author's own work).

Figure No. 4

INDIA AND ITS QUAD PARTNERS		
UNITED STATES	AUSTRALIA	JAPAN
<b>2+2 Ministerial Agreements</b> GSOMIA, LEMOA, COMCASA, ISA, HOSIAC	<b>2+2 Ministerial Agreements</b> Mutual Logistics Support Agreement, Information Sharing Agreement	<b>2+2 Ministerial Agreements</b> GSOMIA, Reciprocal Provision of Supplies & Services
<b>Dialogues</b> Defense policy, defense technology & trade, maritime security, etc.	<b>Dialogues</b> Defense policy, defense research & material, maritime security (+ Indonesia)	<b>Dialogues</b> Defense policy, joint research on UGVs & robotics technology
<b>Bilateral Military Exercises</b> VAJRA PRAHAR, YUDH ABHYAS, COPE INDIA, Tiger TRIUMPH	<b>Bilateral Military Exercises</b> AUSINDEX, AUSTRA HIND	<b>Bilateral Military Exercises</b> JIMEX, DHARMA GUARDIAN, SHINYUU MAITRI, SAHYOG-KALINI
<b>Joint Training of Peacekeepers</b>	<b>Staff Talks</b> All 3 services	<b>Staff Talks</b> All 3 services
<b>Indian Liaison at NAVCENT</b>	<b>Participation in Australian Exercises</b> PITCH BLACK, KAKADU	
<b>Defense Deals</b> C-17, C-130J, P-8I, M777, SIG716, AH64E, CH-47F(I), MH-60R		

Indian agreements with its QUAD partners (author's own work).

The figure 4 shows India's agreement with QUAD countries.

QUAD predominantly aims at containing China; however, none of the countries have directly pointed out this aim. From the analyses of press releases by the foreign affairs departments of various

QUAD countries, not even one has hinted towards such an aim (mostly do not even mention the word “China” in them). It shows that even if QUAD has caused significant strategic changes in the region, it is far from being a substitute of Chinese presence in the region or even near containing its influence.

### **Growing Strategic Competition in South Asia**

Indo-Pacific is defined as the new theatre of strategic competition by Tokyo, Canberra, and Washington, where India has taken the central position. India’s primary motivation to join the bandwagon of Indo-Pacific is that India views China’s growing presence in the Indian Ocean region and South Asia as an encirclement strategy. Previously, India was the sole ruler of the Indian Ocean, as there was no competitor. India was free to pursue its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. Against this backdrop, China’s rise as an alternate security provider posed a direct challenge to Indian hegemony over the Indian Ocean and forced India to revisit its maritime policies. India fears Beijing’s ability to offer strategic economic opportunities and military assistance to its neighbouring countries. In this regard, it has entered multiple agreements with the west to counter Chinese influence.

India has opted for Indo-Pacific for it offers a new theatre of opportunity allowing it to formulate new strategic and security collaborations, which further paves the way for strengthening India’s strategic and diplomatic footprint.<sup>41</sup> Island Nations and neighbouring small countries play a pivotal part in formulating India’s security policies. The Sino-Indian competition is derived from the maritime domain by the increasing ties between China and Island states like Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Seychelles.<sup>42</sup>

In 2017, Hambantota Port was leased to China due to its inability to re-pay Chinese loans by the Sri Lankan Government.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Darshana M. Baruah, “India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi’s Theater of Opportunity,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 30, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/30/india-in-indo-pacific-new-delhi-s-theater-of-opportunity-pub-82205>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>

This drew concerns from India on the Chinese new port in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, growing maritime developments of China in Maldives and Sri Lanka helped it to gain geographical proximity to India.<sup>44</sup> The ties between China and Sri Lanka grew under Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa where two Chinese submarines docked in Colombo for the first time.<sup>45</sup> It was a concern for India due to its unprecedented nature. Furthermore, accessing Sri Lankan ports opened more avenues for Beijing to be closer to India. Conversely, the ties between India and Maldives continue to deteriorate under Abdul Yameen Abdul Gayoom, where a US \$511 million contract for expanding an international airport was cancelled with an Indian based group.<sup>46</sup> A Chinese company later won the same contract.<sup>47</sup> However, with the change of political power in Maldives in 2018, the relations between both countries (India and Maldives) have normalized to a great extent.

Nonetheless, these islands are of vital strategic importance for India as they provide key chokepoints to access vast maritime domains. Furthermore, these are also near crucial trading routes in the Indian Ocean. Hostility with the rulers of these countries also added fuel to the fire. Due to China's growing influence, New Delhi realized that gone were the days when India was the sole provider of security to the small islands. It called for breaking the long-standing inertia towards the Island states.

India made changes in its island diplomacy and created Indian Ocean Region Division (IOR) within its Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). In this division, India brought together islands like Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka with the aims of

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<sup>44</sup> Suhasini Haidar, "Will Gotabaya Rajapaksa Make Peace With India?" *The Hindu*, November 17, 2019,

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/analysis-modi-greets-gotabaya-but-apprehensions-remain-for-new-delhi/article29999298.ece>

<sup>45</sup> Shihar Aneez and Ranga Sirilal, "Chinese Submarine Docks in Sri Lanka Despite Indian Concerns," *Reuters*, November 2, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/sri-lanka-china-submarine/chinese-submarine-docks-in-sri-lanka-despite-indian-concerns-idINKBN0IM0LU20141102>.

<sup>46</sup> "Maldives Airport to Be Expanded With Controversial \$800m China Contract," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/maldives-airport-expanded-800m-china-contract>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

increasing collaboration.<sup>48</sup> Although India is making changes, the maritime domain is new for India. India's failure to incorporate Madagascar and Comoros in IOR Division until December 2019 indicates that India has yet to traverse a long road ahead to obtain its desired outcomes.

### **India's Maritime Developments**

In the maritime domain, the Indian Navy is working on two agendas mainly. The first one is the creation of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) across the Indian Ocean.<sup>49</sup> Its main aim is to provide information about all the movements in the region to help formulate better policy options. The second part is to maximize India's operational ability across the region by making it more visible and by maximizing its outreach.<sup>50</sup>

India has recently conducted Malabar exercises where for the first time, all the QUAD countries participated in these exercises.<sup>51</sup> These exercises started in 1992 between US and India and were later joined by Japan in 2015.<sup>52</sup> The recent exercises took place in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea during the first week of November 2020.<sup>53</sup> China has repeatedly raised concerns over such exercises in the past<sup>54</sup> for it views these exercises as an effort to contain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. It is pertinent to note that Australia was invited to join these exercises two weeks after the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Directorate of Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy, *Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy)*, October 2015, [https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_Document\\_25Jan16.pdf](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Barauch, "India's Presence in the Indo-Pacific."

<sup>51</sup> Alasdair Pal, "Factbox: What is the Malabar Exercise, and Why is It Significant?," *Reuters*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-military-exercises-factbox-idUSKBN2751C1>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> "The second Phase of Malabar Exercise Begins in the Northern Arabian Sea," *The Economic Times*, November 17, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/second-phase-of-malabar-exercise-begins-in-northern-arabian-sea/articleshow/79262913.cms>.

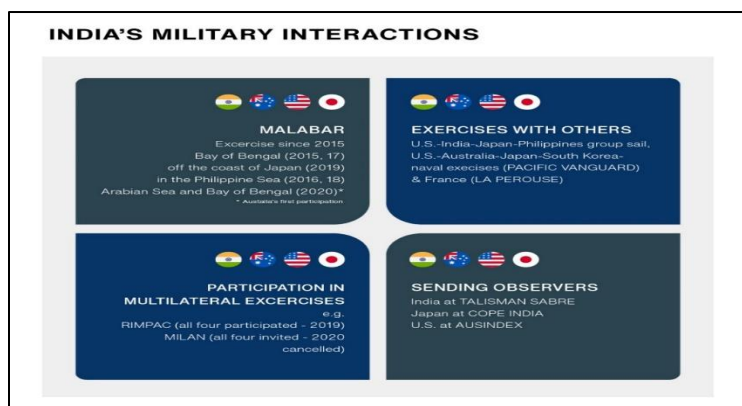
<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

meeting of Foreign Ministers of QUAD countries in Tokyo to discuss enhanced cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>55</sup>

### India's Military Developments

Other than increasing its maritime capabilities, India is also flexing its military muscle by acquiring advanced technologies. In this milieu, the US and India have recently completed the troika of signing strategic foundational agreements in the form of Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).<sup>56</sup> These agreements provide India strong military advantage, raising serious concerns for neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Owing to its on-going standoff with India on eastern Ladakh border, China is also concerned about India's increased military advantage due to these agreements.

Figure No. 5



The QUAD and India's military interactions (author's own work).

<sup>55</sup>"Quad FM Meet in Japan to Discuss Regional Issues, Affirm Importance of Free, Open Indo-Pacific," *Business world*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.businessworld.in/article/Quad-FM-meet-in-Japan-to-discuss-regional-issues-affirm-importance-of-free-open-Indo-Pacific/01-10-2020-327049/>.

<sup>56</sup>Shubhajit Roy, "Explained: BECA, and the Importance of 3 Foundational Pacts of India-US Defence Cooperation," *The Indian Express*, November 3, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/beca-india-us-trade-agreements-rajnath-singh-mike-pompeo-6906637/>.

The figure 5 shows India's military interactions with different countries:

### **Security Dilemma in the Region**

As the Indo-Pacific gained strategic opportunities for India, it became more difficult for the small countries to choose sides in the Sino-India rivalry. Pakistan is also directly affected by India's pursuits in the maritime domain and its new multilateral and bilateral agreements to gain military advantage. India's growing hegemonic pursuits are inviting a new security dilemma in the region where one country's military advantage, i.e., India, poses a direct challenge to the others, i.e., Pakistan, China, and small neighbouring countries. In this regard, India's growing military agreements compel Pakistan and other small countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal to increase their defence capabilities too. In this way, these new developments under the rubric of Indo-Pacific could be a harbinger of an arms race in the region with no end in sight.

### **BRI vs. Indo Pacific**

For years Asia has been waiting for a comprehensive infrastructural development promoting connectivity between different world regions. In this regard, China announced its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013<sup>57</sup> offering a promising aim to redress these gaps. Given its lucrative nature, the Chinese initiative invited interests from India's neighbouring countries. Lack of alternatives made BRI the top choice of the countries resulting in increased Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region. It also provided China the opportunity to develop its maritime infrastructure in Maldives and Sri Lanka.<sup>58</sup> In 2017, India formulated its strategy against BRI. The main concern was BRI's strategic implications for the immediate Indian neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean.<sup>59</sup> In 2017, China invited

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<sup>57</sup> Darshana M. Baruah, "India's Answer to the Belt and Road: A Road Map for South Asia," *Carnegie India*, August 21, 2018, <https://carnegieindia.org/2018/08/21/india-s-answer-to-belt-and-road-road-map-for-south-asia-pub-77071>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



India to join BRI.<sup>60</sup> However, as a response, India raised concerns over BRI, claiming that, “connectivity initiatives must be based on universally recognized international norms... (and) must follow principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burden for communities.”<sup>61</sup>

The US is also one of the opponents of BRI and is excessively investing (see announcement of US \$113 and US \$330 million above) in the Indo-Pacific region to counter China's BRI. US announced its funding offering a region where everyone will have equal access to global commons under its Indo-Pacific strategy. US also promised an economically prosperous and open region with lucrative economic agreements and connectivity.<sup>62</sup> However, these amounts are dwarfed by Chinese's US\$1 trillion project<sup>63</sup> and have failed to attract indigenous actors towards US and its FOIP despite offering economic incentives. It only indicates that Chinese influence is growing in the region and beyond.

## Conclusion

The above analysis indicates that the term 'Indo-Pacific' has no uniform definition for various regional and global actors. Even as a construct aimed at containing growing Chinese influence in the region, it has fallen short of providing novel concepts or alternatives to fulfil these aims. From this, it is safe to deduce that the very premise on which the term 'Indo-Pacific' is based is flawed for it fails to provide a new regional order. It indicates

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<sup>60</sup> “China Wants India to Be Part of Belt and Road Initiative(BRI),” *India Today*, April 21, 2017, <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/china-wants-india-to-be-part-of-belt-and-road-initiativebri-912552-2017-04-21>.

<sup>61</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Official Spokesperson's Response to a Query on Participation of India in OBOR/ BRI Forum,” May 13, 2017, <https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/28463/Official+Spokespersons+response+to+a+query+on+participation+of+India+in+OBORBRI+Forum>.

<sup>62</sup> Secretary Mike Pompeo, “America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision,” *US Chamber of Commerce*, July 30, 2018 <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284722.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, “China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

the artificial and forceful nature of the term 'Indo-Pacific' where the ASEAN countries remain decidedly non-aligned. However, changes in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean with particular reference to QUAD and India's crucial role in it are not without implications. The recent developments have provided India with military and naval advantage over its neighbours, which is a grave concern for major actors in South Asia fearing the advent of a new arms race.

## Chapter No. 12

# Deconstructing India's Maritime Narrative: Strategic Ramifications for China and Pakistan

Muhammad Ali Baig\* and Hassan Tariq\*\*

### Abstract

The Indian Ocean is the third largest water body and is growlingly becoming an arena of competition between China and India. The Indian Ocean Region holds significant importance for global maritime trade flow as more than half of global oil passes through it. Consequently, both India and China heavily rely on it for their respective seaborne trade. The latter increases the importance of the body manifold. However, the growing Indian naval presence along with economic and political interests is endangering the peace and stability of the region. It has the potential in leaving its impression on the political dynamics of the region. The paper aimed to highlight Indian ambitions and its expanding geopolitical fascination with the Indian Ocean Region along with naval expansion. Pivoted upon its growing interests, the article highlighted the ramifications of this struggle for China and Pakistan. This study also provided a relevant way ahead for both states to keep their interests protected in the region.

**Keywords:** Indian Ocean; India; China; Pakistan; Maritime Security; Naval Power.

### Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) covers an enormous area, almost 6 times the total area of the United States. The *CIA World Factbook* noted that the Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean of the world, only surpassed by the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. However, it is a bit larger than those of Southern and Arctic oceans. It was estimated that the water body covers almost

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68.556 million square kilometres and comprises of various smaller water bodies. Such includes the seas of Andaman, Arabian, Flores, the Great Australian Bight, the sea of Java, Mozambique Channel, Red Sea, Savu Sea, Timor Sea, and other tributary water bodies. It also has the strategically vital Strait of Malacca. It has main seaports at Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai belonging to India; Colombo of Sri Lanka; Durban and Richards Bay of South Africa; Jakarta of Indonesia; Melbourne of Australia. The largest bay of the Indian Ocean is the Bay of Bengal. It also hosts three major gulfs including the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, and the strategically vital Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup>

The IOR encompasses 34 littoral states. The enormous mass and geostrategic position of the IOR attests its significance in the international geostrategic calculus. It stems from the shores of Eastern Africa and expands to the Western shoreline of Australia and besides a hub to 34 littoral states, its geography hosts vital naval chokepoints. Also, its geographical position, the IOR acts as the main supply line of hydrocarbons to the world and home of the global Petro trade. Its important Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) makes it an indispensable instrument in the eyes of the world and a permanent aspect of becoming strategically relevant for the littoral states and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from its geostrategic importance, in the past, the Indian Ocean remained a backwater to major global powers rivalry and global geopolitics. Till the end of the Second World War, most of the littoral states of Indian Ocean remained under British colonial rule and were passing through the developing phase, and later during the Cold War, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans were epicentres of the war affairs. With the passage of time and growth of the neighbouring states to the IOR, proved its significance to the great powers. It would not be ambitious to argue that contemporarily, the IOR has become the new laboratory for great power politics. Previously, the IOR gained importance for its hydrocarbon trade

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Abdullah Toukan, "The Indian Ocean Region: A Strategic Net Assessment" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2014), 1–25.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Abbas Hassan, "Growing China-India Competition in the Indian Ocean: Implications for Pakistan," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 77–89.

and naval choke points including the important straits of Hormuz, Bab-al-Mandeb, and Malacca. Nevertheless, oil trade routes and choke points are still completely relevant today and have acquired new dimensions.

The Indian Ocean came to international limelight when Britain announced its troop withdrawal from the East of Suez in January 1968. Nevertheless, the Lusaka Conference in 1970 called for the demilitarization of the Indian Ocean and hoped for peaceful international waters.<sup>3</sup> However, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War and U.S. military operations against Iraq i.e. Operation *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm*, the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean almost became permanent.<sup>4</sup> Previously, the U.S. Navy conducted Operation *Earnest Will* and *Praying Mantis* in the Persian Gulf as well.<sup>5</sup> Later, with the U.S. military presence at British overseas territory i.e. Diego Garcia, the Indian Ocean was overtly militarized. In prevalent times, the key international power like the U.S. with the cooperation and collaboration of India wants to dominate the IOR. The main theme behind all this activity is to contain the Chinese rise and to hinder its economic progress. Particularly, the Indian strategy is to dominate the IOR, while meticulously denying other regional powers to achieve maritime foothold in the third largest water body of the world. It is necessary to indicate here that China is struggling in the IOR in ensuring the free navigation and to achieve a considerable footprint but also to project its regional maritime prowess.

Following the ambitions of both India and China, other states are striving in making their allies who can support them in the region. The growing Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean, raised serious implications for other neighbouring littoral states including Pakistan. Being a part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), such

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<sup>3</sup> Gurnam Singh, "China and the Indian Ocean Region," *China Report* 20, no. 3 (1984): 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Bateman, Rajni Gamage, and Jane Chan, *ASEAN and the Indian Ocean: The Key Maritime Links*, RSIS Monograph No. 33 (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2017), 21-26.

<sup>5</sup> David B. Crist, "Joint Special Operations in Support of Earnest Will," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 29 (Winter 2001): 15-16.

strategic competition increased manifold strategic implications for Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Presently, the economic and political manifestation of IOR made it active and contentious among great powers. Thus, the wise words credited to one of the most influential maritime strategists, i.e., Alfred Thayer Mahan resonate that "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean controls Asia. The Indian Ocean is the gateway to the world's seven seas. The destiny of the world in the 21st century will be determined by the Indian Ocean."<sup>7</sup> This is predominantly factual in the strategic setting for the pursuit of achieving maritime impact in the region.<sup>8</sup> The future commotion in Indian Ocean will be demarcated by huge trade, technology and energy transfer, political turbulence, threats from piracy, and mercenary armed actions including transnational crimes.

Ostensibly, it is an arena that is witnessing an intense struggle for influence, and the succeeding swings in the forces of change in the region. The IOR is likely to be the epicentre of future world politics, as, India has emerged being the fifth largest economy of the world, by outshining the United Kingdom and France. By attaining such credentials, it is intrinsic for India to demand a larger role and for that to accomplish, it has eagerly started to establish itself regionally.<sup>9</sup> The Indian hegemonic ambitions in Indian Ocean raised concerns for China that is the world's second-largest economy and moving ahead increasingly. The latter heavily relies on the SLOCs of the Indian Ocean for its seaborne trade activities.

The ocean, on the one hand, has intensified the rivalry between China and India. While, on the other hand, raised implications for other littoral states of Indian Ocean, most importantly, Pakistan. Considerable Indian existence in the Indian Ocean is a matter of grave concern for Pakistan, as it is undermining Islamabad's future and current gains in the region. The strategic struggle between

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<sup>6</sup> Hassan, "Growing China-India Competition in the Indian Ocean: Implications for Pakistan," 77-89.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "China and the United States in the Indian Ocean," *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 52.

<sup>8</sup> P K Ghosh, "Indian Ocean Dynamics: An Indian Perspective," *East Asia Forum*, April 5, 2011, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/04/05/indian-ocean-dynamics-an-indian-perspective/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Top 10 Economies in the World by GDP 2019-2020," *PickyTop*, January 12, 2020, <https://pickytop.com/top-10-economies-in-the-world/>.

China and India is associated with their economic progress and inherent energy needs. Such necessities are seaborne in nature and has a direct relation with that of the Indian Ocean.<sup>10</sup> The American presence in the Indian Ocean has multiplied the challenges, and most importantly the American support to India in IOR raised security threats for China and Pakistan, almost collectively. Back in 2018, at some point in the meeting on the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the American Deputy Assistant Secretary Alex Wong said that "It is in our interest, the US interest, as well as the interests of the region, that India plays an increasingly weighty role in the region.

India is a nation that is invested in a free and open order."<sup>11</sup> This shows strong American intentions in favour of significant Indian role in Indian Ocean. It also resonates that the centre stage of foreseeable international politico-strategic occurrences likely will be IOR and is of serious significance for the major players and the other neighbouring states. The CPEC as a part and parcel of BRI, increased American and Indian frustration in IOR. The economic rise of China and its subsequent dividends for Pakistan, is seemingly unacceptable for India and the U.S. and this situation makes IOR furthermore of critical importance. This is creating serious tensions in the region, as India is continuously increasing its naval capabilities in the IOR. However, the ostensibly gloomy situation, must be dealt rationally. Nonetheless, the possibilities of a much larger conflict remain on the low; however, "intentions can change overnight."<sup>12</sup>

### Indian Interests in the Indian Ocean

India has an approximate coastline of 7,000 km and being the largest littoral state, it has relatively larger aims and objectives in the region.<sup>13</sup> Comparable to Pakistan, India also possesses a vital

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<sup>10</sup> Specialist in Asian Affairs, "China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress" (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 20, 2018), 1-18.

<sup>11</sup> "Briefing on The Indo-Pacific Strategy," *United States Department of State*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/briefing-on-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Why AirSea Battle?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), vii.

<sup>13</sup> "India," *The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency*, March 15, 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>.

geostrategic position, and has enormous shorelines on both of the Eastern and Western fronts. For its aims to realize, India has already founded 12 major ports and some 200 minor ones in the overall IOR. To maximize itself in the maritime domain, India also started a strategic plan called the Sagarmala Strategy, that wishes to have a twofold increase in its current harbours in the country. Apart from all these steps at the domestic level, it is strengthening its muscles by collaborating with neighbouring littoral states in the IOR including the Chabahar port with Iran; Seychelles; Mauritius; and Sri Lanka. India is also collaborating with African countries to increase its strength and support in IOR like Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Kenya. As for the Indian strategic moves in the IOR, includes securing access in the port of Duqm in Oman for strategic purposes. It is also co-developing the deep-sea port at Sabang in Indonesia. Indian officials are negotiating for a potential military outpost in Seychelles at Assumption Island and is finalizing logistics agreements with the U.S., Singapore, and France.

These decisions and subsequent actions reveal India's quest for a considerable maritime presence in the IOR for maintaining dominance and further deterring potential extra-regional powers. The incumbent Modi Government in India is ambitious in gaining more control of IOR and visiting Indian Ocean countries for seeking their support in the region.<sup>14</sup>

Most important and critical Indian infrastructure development in IOR is the development of Chabahar port with Iran. The geographical position of Iran and its location in the immediate vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz, adds momentous significance towards its international stature. About 30 percent of the total global hydrocarbons gets transported across the strait, almost every day.<sup>15</sup> For the past many decades, Iran could not harness this natural blessing; however, soon after the beginning of the Gwadar port project of Pakistan with the collaboration of China, Iran started working on Chabahar port with the assistance of India. The latter

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<sup>14</sup> Vivek Mishra, "Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy," *The Diplomat*, June 7, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/consolidating-indias-indian-ocean-strategy/>.

<sup>15</sup> Chinmoyee Das, "Changing Contours of India's Ocean Strategy, 2004-2015," *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs* 10, no. 3 (2018): 153-67.



started strategic partnership with Iran to develop the first segment of Iranian port at Chabahar. Same as Gwadar Port, India can readily achieve continental access into the Central Asia by Chabahar port. However, the latter's operational utility is highly dependent on a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. As, India is aspiring to connect the port to Central Asia, while passing through Afghanistan. It also built the Zubak-Dilaram Road to further such initiatives. Indian moves clearly demonstrate its interests in the IOR.<sup>16</sup> It is imperative to mention that America driven by its strategic necessities, has given India a special waiver along with eight other states, in relation to sanctions against Iran. It reflects the overlapping of strategic interests of the U.S. and India and significant measures to protect the latter's investment in the region. In 2019, after joining his office for the second time, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to visit the Maldives, and apart from many differences between both countries, he intended to consolidate the Indian vision in the Indian Ocean.<sup>17</sup>

### Indian Sagarmala Strategy

What is India's Sagarmala Strategy? Before moving on into the details, if one looks closely at the very word "Sagarmala" and its etymology, then it is revealed that the coined term has cultural and social connotations attached to it. Interestingly, "Sagar" means coast or the coastal region; and "mala" means necklace, usually worn by women. And typically, a necklace contains beads of precious gems and stones to further the beauty and elegance.<sup>18</sup> Two different words combined together; the term refers to as the necklace of the coastal region. In other words, the Sagarmala Strategy, or the Sagarmala Development Project, is a well-calculated attempt by India to develop its coastal regions by building ports for shipping and related projects to develop the adjacent areas.<sup>19</sup> On the other

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<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Abbas Hassan, "Issue Brief on 'Modi's Maritime Ambitions – Implications for Pakistan,'" *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, June 14, 2018, <http://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-modis-maritime-ambitions-implications-for-pakistan/>.

<sup>17</sup> Mishra, "Consolidating India's Indian Ocean Strategy."

<sup>18</sup> The author is a native speaker of Urdu language and could easily understand the coined term.

<sup>19</sup> P. V. Rao, "'Development through Connectivity': India's Maritime Narrative," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 15, no. 3 (2019): 245–64.

hand, PM Modi envisaged another meaning to SAGAR which means Security and Growth for All in the Region, in his 2015 speech at Mauritius.<sup>20</sup> Before that, India's Project Mausam in 2014 with symbolic routes including Spice Route and Cotton Route, intended to revive the ancient routes.<sup>21</sup>

According to the official sources of the Indian Government, the strategy is a part of the National Perspective Plan that was approved in March 2015; however, a comprehensive development plan was announced in April 2016 at the Indian Maritime Summit. The government intends to invest almost 9 trillion rupees in building a network of roadways, railways, waterways, and pipelines.<sup>22</sup> These instruments are intended to facilitate and shorten the distances between industrial zones and ports, in enhancing the transportation towards ports, mainly for the purpose of exports. Apart from the lucrative exports, the strategy would generate millions of jobs and connect India's "hinterland" with that of its coastal land.<sup>23</sup>

According to the *CIA Factbook*, India has a total coastline of almost 7,000 kilometres and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) includes around 314,070 square kilometres. By size, its geographical area is ranked as number eight in the world and almost 60.5 percent of its land is used for agricultural purposes. It is ranked at number three in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by means of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).<sup>24</sup> However, with these superb credentials and overwhelmingly agrarian economy; why would India need to develop its coastal region? Perhaps, the answer to this question was

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<sup>20</sup> Prof. V.N. Attri, "Indo-Pacific Construct: Evolving an IORA's Perspective in Terms of Strategic Regional Economic Cooperation," *Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2019): 11–57.

<sup>21</sup> Gurpreet S. Khurana, "China, India and 'Maritime Silk Road': Seeking a Confluence," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 19–29; Fuzuo Wu, "India's Pragmatic Foreign Policy toward China's BRI and AIIB: Struggling for Relative and Absolute Gains," *Journal of Contemporary China*, July 24, 2019, doi:10.1080/10670564.2019.1645486.

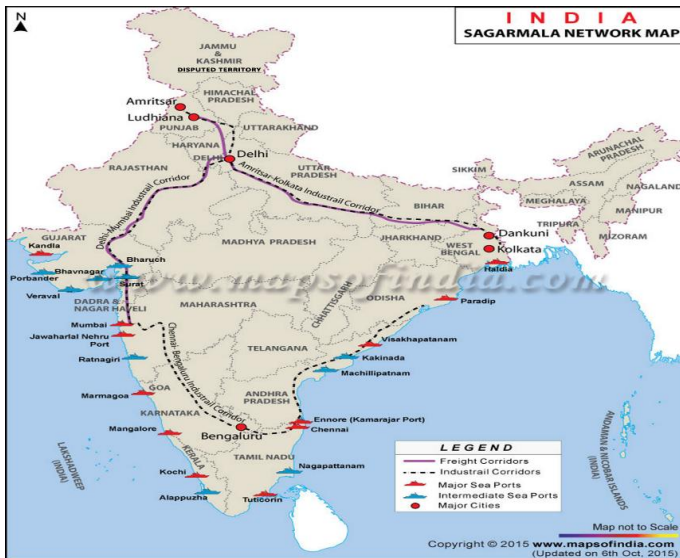
<sup>22</sup> "SagarMala," Ministry of Shipping, Government of India, March 20, 2020, <http://sagarmala.gov.in/>.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. R. P. Pradhan and Dr. Jajati K. Pattnaik, "Chabahar to Sagarmala: Making Sense of India's External & Hinterland Sea Lane Prospects," *World Focus*, September 2016, 39–44.

<sup>24</sup> "India."

addressed in the United States Navy's "*A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*," issued back in March 2015. The strategy revealed that almost seventy percent of the population of the entire world lives in or in the vicinity of coastal regions. A previous version of the strategy was also published in October 2007.<sup>25</sup> It is believed that the American strategy deeply motivated India in taking such an initiative, as, both states seem to have a streamlined trajectory in approaching international relations. Holmes, *et al.*, also attested this notion and argued that India's doctrinal text *Freedom to Use Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy* and U.S. Navy's strategy were released almost at the same time.<sup>26</sup>

Figure No.1



The illustration of India's Sagarmala Project.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ray Mabius, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (United States of America: United States Navy, 2015); *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (United States of America: United States Navy, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner, and Toshi Yoshihara, *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 115–16.

<sup>27</sup> "Sagarmala Network Project Map," *Maps of India*, October 6, 2015, <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/sagarmala-project-network-map.html>. (amended and emphasis added)

In retrospect, undoubtedly, India's Sagarmala strategy is a building block of India's motivations in becoming a functional and effective great player. The strategy is a precedent for Pakistan to develop its valuable coastline. Islamabad can learn a lot from the experiences of New Delhi in benefitting from the latter's port development plans. It is understandable that ports are strategic assets of a nation which serve as a launching pad for trade. However, besides trade, these ports can readily serve as naval bases for patrolling the EEZ and to project power beyond the shores. Historically, Grotius contemplated the high seas as the shared heritage of the human race and noted that it "can be neither seized nor enclosed; nay, which rather possesses the earth than is by it possessed."<sup>28</sup> However, every coastal nation seems to be in a constant struggle in possessing the seas. Arguably, India's Sagarmala strategy is a calculated attempt in making Indian Ocean as 'India's Ocean'.

### **Indian Naval Influence in the Indian Ocean**

The passing decade witnessed some rapid developments in the military activities around the world, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East Asia. The Indian maritime services have played a dynamic role in monitoring the incidents happening in the IOR. Through the progression of period and nurturing worldwide economies, the strategic thinking of numerous states is rallying on the IOR. The latter is responsible in substantially contributing in the global sea trade routes with more than 50 percent of global hydrocarbons passing through it. India heavily depends upon the ocean, as its almost 95 percent global trade is carried through it including the import of vital petroleum products. It imports a total of 83 percent of crude oil to keep its industries running.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, the Modi administration made calculated efforts in recalibrating its politico-economic connections regarding the countries in the vicinity of the IOR. India signed different strategic pacts with France and the United States, to offer them naval and air bases for military purposes in the region. For instance, the Civil

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<sup>28</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1916), 94.

<sup>29</sup> Avinandan Choudhury and P. Moorthy, "Strategic-Maritime Triangle in the Indian Ocean: An Emerging Indo-US Naval Entente?," *India Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2018): 1–21.

Nuclear Deal between the U.S. and India, and the Joint Malabar Naval Exercises, are some of the most significant deals. Likewise, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) can be argued as among such converging strategic orientations.<sup>30</sup> The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and the recently signed Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) are also likely to bring Indo-U.S. strategic cooperation to heightened levels.<sup>31</sup> Contemporarily, the seaport of Djibouti, located at the Horn of Africa, retains imminent strategic importance to both India and China.<sup>32</sup>

Currently, the Indian Navy has roughly a total of 140 combat and supporting vessels including an aircraft carrier, i.e. *INS Vikramaditya*. It also planned the procurement of 56 more vessels and 6 underwater vessels i.e. submarines. Keeping in view, the importance of Indian Ocean, Indian Naval Chief ambitioned to include 200 more warships and 500 aircraft in its arsenal. Furthermore, in October 2018, Russia and India mutually reached a deal amounting to 95 million USD for acquiring “two stealth frigates.” For the imminent future, India is aspiring to give its naval forces a facelift by increasing the number of sea-going vessels to 212 and a total of 458 aircrafts for the naval air arm. However, currently, the Indian Navy operates almost 138 vessels and 235 aircrafts including helicopters and fixed wing aircrafts to conduct search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), combat air patrol, anti-piracy, and anti-submarine warfare operations.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Ali Baig and Hamid Iqbal, “A Comparative Study of Blitzkrieg and Cold Start Doctrine: Lessons and Countermeasures for Pakistan,” *IPRI Journal* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 29–30.

<sup>31</sup> “Joint Statement on the Second U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue,” *United States Department of State*, December 19, 2019, 2, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-second-u-s-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>; “US-India 2+2: Crucial Defence Deal Signed,” *BBC News*, October 27, 2020, 2, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-54655947>.

<sup>32</sup> Beenesh Ansari, “Expansion of Indian Naval Forces in the Indian Ocean,” *Daily Times*, October 29, 2019, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/491033/expansion-of-indian-naval-forces-in-the-indian-ocean/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; Koh Swee Lean Collin, “China-India Rivalry at Sea: Capability, Trends and Challenges,” *Asian Security* 15, no. 1 (2019): 5–24.

Seemingly, India is committed and determined in inflating its naval power by acquiring resources and equipping its naval forces with adequate firepower to overpower potential and perceived enemies in the IOR. It is not ambitious to argue that such aspirations are aimed to deny enemy of access and to establish maritime supremacy with a specific aim to put such supremacy at test if necessary. In aftermath of downing of a U.S. drone by Iranian air defence in June 2019 over the Strait of Hormuz, the Indian Navy was quick to react and attested its mobility by deploying few of its vessels in and around the vicinities of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. The primary objective of India at the instant is to somehow curtail Chinese trade and control Indian Ocean trade routes. It is very much unlikely that India could contain the rising China all by itself. For such ambitious endeavours to realise, it is seeking the assistance of the U.S., Australia, Japan, and other likeminded littoral states in the IOR and East Asia.<sup>34</sup> It is notable that India is collaborating closely with these nations, i.e., the Malabar Naval Exercises, to build its naval capability and to be effectively felt by competitors. Also, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue also known as QUAD, comprising of U.S., Australia, Japan, and India, can be interpreted as the culmination of such ventures.<sup>35</sup>

It is noteworthy that the U.S., Australia, and Japan maintain historical animosity with China, and the researchers argue that such a hostile history likely will reap considerable rewards for India. The latter is slowly, yet surely moving towards building a strong maritime presence, since the dawn of the Twenty-first century and has restructured its tri-forces command at the strategically important Andaman and Nicobar Islands, that is located in the vicinity of the strategically vital Malacca Strait. It is relentlessly trying to establish advanced acoustics and SONAR<sup>36</sup> facilities at Madagascar and Mauritius, to detect super silent Chinese

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<sup>34</sup> Aman Thakker, "A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/npfp/rising-india-indian-ocean-needs-strong-navy>.

<sup>35</sup> Indian scholars trumpeted the creation of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD as a bulwark against China. Jagannath P. Panda, "China's Tryst with the IORA: Factoring India and the Indian Ocean," *Strategic Analysis* 38, no. 5 (2014): 668–87.

<sup>36</sup> SONAR stands for Sound Navigation and Ranging, an instrument for the detection of underwater vehicles including submarines.

submarines equipped with air-independent propulsion (AIP) and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs). To ensure communications and avoid jamming of radars i.e. electronic warfare, and to move towards Network Centric Warfare (NCW). It also launched a military satellite for enhanced offshore communications. The Indian Navy comprising of small flotillas also started visiting the states located in the IOR in a desperate effort to project power on a yearly basis; however, such voyages have gained traction since Modi came to power.

In 2013-14, the Indian naval vessels took part in visits to almost 50 states, along with its only aircraft carrier's friendly ports calls to Maldives and Sri Lanka. Later, during 2016, the navy organized an international fleet review involving 50 states with more than 100 participating vessels. In the following year, it launched "mission-based deployments" which are continuing. And in 2018, India deployed Su-30 fighters along with other maritime patrol aircrafts at Andaman and Nicobar Islands, primarily to conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions vis-à-vis Chinese naval vessels. The Indian Navy aspires to establish a considerable credibility in maintaining its presence felt near and around the Indira Point in the IOR. To realize such ambitions, India requires port access and has readily acquired such rights in 2016 to use Diego Garcia from the U.S., Duqm Port from Oman, and to use Reunion Island of France. Also, in 2018, it was reported that India was in the process of finalizing an agreement with Seychelles to establish a naval base at the Assumption Island.<sup>37</sup>

India is enhancing its military activities in respective countries by financial assistance, military training, educational development, logistic and technical support, and capacity building. For instance, India has stationed its troops in the Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius to teach and train native forces in using patrol crafts, rotary-wing aircrafts, and small vessels. Such a military hardware was also provided by India to those countries. Also, India has considerably enhanced financial assistance to those countries after

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<sup>37</sup> Satoru Nagao, "The Growing Militarization of the Indian Ocean Power Game and Its Significance for Japan | List of Articles," *International Information Network Analysis*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/nagao-india-powergame.html>.

2013. For example, Prime Minister Modi agreed to an aid deal amounting to 500 million USD to upgrade the Bangladesh Air Force. The aid was destined to help Bangladesh in repairing its ageing aircrafts and in determining its selection of next-generation fighters.<sup>38</sup> Indian aims are to strengthen their foothold in these countries and later to exploit them by gaining its control in IOR.

Keeping in account the importance of islands, the incumbent President of India Ram Nath Kovind visited Madagascar in the first quarter of 2019 for the first time in history. The novel visit by any Indian highest-level state official highlights not only Madagascar's importance in Indian strategic calculus with special regards to the IOR region, but also indicates its historical disregard towards island nations. History reveals that aspiring great powers tend to have a considerable influence in islands and use such launching pads to project power way beyond their shores. In this connection, the most important strategic islands of the Indian Ocean are Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles. These oceanic islands span from India to Africa. Their strategic importance is highlighted by their location along key SLOCs. These four islands provide good coverage of south and the central Indian Ocean. Controlling these islands would directly mean strong Indian footholds on SLOCs. Moreover, it will have direct implications for China and Pakistan.

Considering Indian naval moves, China has beforehand developed its maritime capacities in the Indian Ocean and has already made this region highly contentious. Being a part of the Chinese-led BRI and its flagship project CPEC, the current and future presence of People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy) in the IOR has serious strategic naval compulsions for Pakistan. The study will now shed some light on the Chinese interests in the region.

### **Chinese Strategic and Economic Interests in the Indian Ocean**

Being the globe's largest exporter of goods and the second-largest economy moving forward at a considerable pace, China fully

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<sup>38</sup> "India Commits \$500 Million Credit for Bangladesh Military," *The New Indian Express*, April 8, 2017, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2017/apr/08/india-commits-500-million-credit-for-bangladesh-military-1591435.html>.



understands that its sustained progress is meticulously related to its capacity in securing SLOCs. Such endeavours could ensure the smooth and secure provision of crude materials, including energy and inorganic resources, and in expanding its maritime trade. Also, to maintain its uninterrupted ingress to fresh marketplaces worldwide. China is the world's biggest importer of hydrocarbon products and more than 80 percent of its oil imports gets transited through strategically important Strait of Malacca, a vulnerable chokepoint. Furthermore, it receives almost two quarters of its hydrocarbons from Africa, and the other two quarters from the Middle East, shipping through the Strait of Hormuz – another vulnerable choke point in the IOR.<sup>39</sup>

China is keen and has also been relentless in making inroads in the IOR. For its policymakers, the large waterways are of paramount importance due to its heavy reliance on seaborne trade and the security of such waterways is its top priority. Furthermore, it has the political will and the strategic wherewithal to realize such ambitions into tangible reality. Also, China is maintaining a considerable influence in IOR countries. The establishment of its first-ever military base in Djibouti clearly reflects its growing foothold in the IOR. The latter has remained relatively a negligible little Eastern African country located precisely at the Horn of Africa. Moreover, Djibouti's geographical location adds strategic value to it, as its coastline borders with the Red Sea and connects the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean Sea. In other words, it is the gateway to Europe. It is worth mentioning that Djibouti is the house to the only American base in Africa and hosts troops belonging to U.S. African Command (USAFRICOM).<sup>40</sup>

Alternatively, the Chinese presence in Africa not only hurts Indian interests but American interests as well. Apart from building a military base, Beijing has invested transversely all around in the Africa on its eastern rim as well as in the inland. The main rationale for this is to reconnoitre fresh marketplaces, consolidate human resources, and to retain actual presence in the African heartland. A

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<sup>39</sup> Shishir Upadhyaya, "Expansion of Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean: Implications for India," *Defence Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 63–83.

<sup>40</sup> Tammy S. Schultz, ed., *Preparing for an Era of Persistent Conflict* (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps University, 2011), 112–13.

few have estimated that China has already invested almost 60 USD billion across Africa and is willing to participate more.<sup>41</sup> The Chinese investments in Kenya are worthy to explore. Initially it loaned a sum of 3.2 billion USD for the construction of 470-kilometre-long railway which is Kenya's largest construction project in the past century. The railway line was aimed to connect its capital Nairobi to the coastal city of Mombasa. Likewise, Chinese state-owned and private corporations are investing in port and other development projects in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh. The Allied powers, like Australia and the U.S., are actively seeking to offset Chinese hiking impact across the region by initiating their own development resources. For instance, the 113 million USD fund was proclaimed in August 2019, for the digital economy, energy, and infrastructure projects. Politically, the Indian Ocean is becoming an essential zone of strategic struggle and it seems that China is ahead in this competition as it is investing multibillion USD in infrastructure development projects across the continent as a part and parcel of its BRI.<sup>42</sup>

In the Indian Ocean, competition between both states is driven to a larger extent by their economic rise and associated rapid growth, and the dependence on seaborne trade and imported energy. Much of the latter is transited through the Indian Ocean. In IOR, much of the activity is associated with China's BRI that can be viewed as an attempt to minimize its strategic vulnerabilities by expanding its trade and energy routes. Also, to improve its political influence through expanded trade and infrastructure investments.<sup>43</sup> The BRI offers a unique opportunity to the littoral states of IOR for their infrastructure development. Under BRI, interconnectivity among neighbouring countries is built by seaports, road, and railway networks. Such seaports are being built mainly in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The 62 billion USD CPEC

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<sup>41</sup> Xiuping Zhang and Bruce P. Corrie, *Investing in China and Chinese Investment Abroad* (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 177–82.

<sup>42</sup> Craig Jeffrey, "Why the Indian Ocean Region Might Soon Play a Lead Role in World Affairs," *The Conversation*, January 15, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/why-the-indian-ocean-region-might-soon-play-a-lead-role-in-world-affairs-109663>.

<sup>43</sup> Specialist in Asian Affairs, "China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress," 1–22.

connects Xinjiang in China to Gwadar Port in Pakistan. In addition, Beijing has plans to connect neighbouring states of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar through networks of roads, rails, pipelines, and ports. The BRI is attractive to most of the regional states as it offers incentives for trade, infrastructural development, and regional connectivity. It aims to enhance the connectivity of infrastructure and building a community of common interests. To promote BRI, China committed to provide investment and financing support for infrastructure, resources, industrial cooperation, financial cooperation, and other projects in BRI partner countries.

However, it is worth mentioning that the Chinese String of Pearls Strategy, as it is referred to by number of American scholars; has somehow the same motivation in building and developing coastal regions.<sup>44</sup> Yet, China intends to build such projects internationally in various continents with vastly geographically displaced regions.<sup>45</sup> These ports are part and parcel of its BRI and the latter's constituent elements i.e. 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Both India and the US are sceptical of BRI, as the fast-paced Chinese influence in the region could undermine their interests in the IOR and Indo-Pacific Region.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Chinese entrance in the IOR through economic investment, political influence, and military presence is seen critically by the US, India, and their allies. The changing regional dynamics of IOR have stimulated Sino-Indian rivalry and raised security concerns for the neighbouring states like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and different islands of the IOR.

### **Chinese Naval Influence in Indian Ocean**

Growing Indo-US nexus in the IOR has raised security implications for Chinese billion dollars investment under BRI. To protect its

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher J. Pehrson, *String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 1-3.

<sup>45</sup> David Brewster, "An Indian Ocean Dilemma: Sino-Indian Rivalry and China's Strategic Vulnerability in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 11, no. 1 (2015): 51-52.

<sup>46</sup> Naren Chitty et al., "The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and the Indian Ocean Region: Sentiment towards Economic Prosperity and Security Implications," *The Indian Journal of Politics* 52, no. 1-2 (2018): 1-20.

investment in BRI's One Belt One Road (OBOR) and 21<sup>st</sup> century MSR, China is increasing its military footprint in the Indian Ocean. The PLA Navy is maintaining its influence since 2008. Initially, it was only confined to anti-piracy and HA/DR detachments and later, it succeeded by the deployment of conventional vessels and nuclear submarines. China established its first offshore military base in Djibouti, which is considerable and hosts high-tech equipment, and clearly reveals its growth as a naval power as well as its use of maritime resources in protecting offshore strategic interests. In the first quarter of 2018, a Chinese surface vessel group, which also featured amphibious vessels for troop landings, traversed into the Indian Ocean through Indonesia's Sunda Straits. Both India and Indonesia raised serious reservations regarding Chinese movement in the Indian Ocean.<sup>47</sup>

China is also initiating port projects along with the vital SLOCs as a part and parcel of its MSR. In this connection, considerably large segment routes through the Indian Ocean are undergoing development ventures e.g. in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, Djibouti, Kenya, and Tanzania. The ostensible 'dual-use' of these seaports for trade and strategic functions is an evolving vogue especially in the Indian Ocean. For instance, Colombo (Sri Lanka), Gwadar (Pakistan), and Djibouti can be readily used to replenish, rearm, or station PLA naval vessels. The surprise stationing of PLA submarines and warships at the commercial Colombo Port City Project almost instantly raised strategic concerns for India. Besides Colombo Port, China has also acquired Hambantota port for 99 years lease from Sri Lanka. Strategically, this port is very important for China, as it located in the vicinity of India's South and provides the PLA with a huge advantage in terms of monitoring all activities carried out by the Indian Navy and the naval air arm. Also, this port can act as an offshore outpost in ensuring the security of China's seaborne trade.<sup>48</sup> Both China and Pakistan have also developed Gwadar port under the CPEC project.

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<sup>47</sup> Garima Mohan, "Great Game in the Indian Ocean," *Global Public Policy Institute*, June 11, 2018, <https://www.gppi.net/2018/06/11/great-game-in-the-indian-ocean>.

<sup>48</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>.

Furthermore, China has also developed its naval linkage with Bangladesh and provided it with two submarines for surveillance in the Indian Ocean. China has also developed its military facilities in Coca Island, and invested in some other Islands and ports like Sonadia Port, Kyauku Port, Kuantan Port, Klang Port, Kuala Linggi International Port, Port Darwin, Port of Tanjung Priok, Bagamoyo Port, and Port of Dar es Salaam to develop its strong footholds in the IOR.

### **Ramifications and Recommendations for China and Pakistan**

In contemporary times, the growing security competition in the Indian Ocean and IOR clearly exhibits strategic rivalry. Recent Chinese and Indian developments in the Indian Ocean show the tendencies of an intense security competition and somehow offensive orientation. In this scenario, the U.S. is backing India to curtail Chinese economic interests. Hitherto, Pakistan's geostrategic position in close vicinity to the global oil lifeline, makes it a part of the great power impending rivalry. The Sino-Indian competition holds strong repercussions for Pakistan's maritime security interests in the region. Since, China and Pakistan maintain a cordial and friendly relationship in which both countries support each other in the time of need. Now both states are closely cooperating for regional connectivity by BRI and CPEC. As a peace-loving nation, Pakistan has been continuously thriving to promoting peace and stability in the region and tried to maintain friendly relations with neighbouring states. Being an important littoral state of the IOR, it is the obligation of Pakistan to ensure its interests but also to avoid any potential conflict. However, it would be rather irrational for Pakistan to keep itself isolated and disconnected following the evolving situation in the IOR.

Historically, India and Pakistan have a long chronology of a bitter relationship. Both states fought three conventional limited wars along with numerous border skirmishes. The long-standing conflict on Kashmir issue and the recent revocation of the special status of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) led to additional worsening of bilateral relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. In this regard, Washington's tilt towards New Delhi has long been irritating for Pakistan. The growing U.S.-Indo cooperation in the IOR is raising serious strategic implications for

China and Pakistan. Also, India is increasing its cooperation with Gulf countries like Oman, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to isolate Pakistan in the region. Moreover, the Indian support to Iran for the development of Chahbhar Port and militarization of Duqm Port is a part of a calculated effort to counter CPEC and undermine the efficacy of Pakistani and Chinese maritime forces.

Likewise, the port of Duqm (Oman) is also of substantial significance to India, as it is the doorway to the Red Sea towards Israel through the Gulf of Eden and is likely to offer logistical assistance to it. Diplomatically, Israel maintains cordial relations with both China and India; however, Tel Aviv's enduring leaning towards Washington has brought the two closer to New Delhi, in relation to Beijing. A dry dock hopefully will also be available at the Duqm Port, letting maintenance without returning the ships back to the Indian based shipyards, therefore promising India's continuous presence and is a great challenge for China and Pakistan. However, steps of developing and gaining access to these strategic ports are strong ominous signs of India's hegemonic plans in the region and its ambitions to insulate Pakistan. Such Indian designs are not only dangerous for Pakistan but could also cause serious implications for China. As, India is increasing its influence in strategically important islands along with SLOCs and such moves would reduce options for China and can negatively impact the latter's trade. In case of any international conflict, in which the two countries may be involved, there are huge chances that India would desire to settle scores with Pakistan using its heavy naval build-up with its allies in tow.

The future interests of China and Pakistan are interconnected in the Indian Ocean and definitely both states likely will increase their cooperation for regional development. In this case, Pakistan must maximize its strategic choices and discover new marketplaces. Like India and China, Pakistan can also approach to African markets for trade. A majority of African countries hold a lot of trade potential and Pakistan can benefit from them. Instead of relying heavily on China for its trade, Pakistan must also seek out other trade markets as a viable option and as a second thought. It could also approach to Gulf countries to increase economic and trade partnership. It can make new export partners in untapped markets and can also further strengthen its foothold by offering military assistance and

military training to smaller states of IOR. The latter tactics are employed by India in Bangladesh, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

The diplomatic manoeuvring by the foreign office can play a significant role in changing regional dynamics. Economic and trade cooperation with regional powers could improve confidence-building measures and allow to create political and military footing in the region. Besides refining trade ties, Pakistan needs to enhance its security by forging its naval capabilities and naval air arm including amphibious capabilities. It being numerically and qualitatively lesser powerful than China and India, must improve its naval capabilities. Inclusion of advanced technology in the naval military arsenal is the critical need of time. Though, Pakistan Navy is effectively and efficiently working in the IOR; however, provided the presence of great powers in the region, improvements in Pakistan's naval arsenal is strongly recommended. Both China and India are investing significantly in all corners of the IOR. It is, thus, of supreme importance for Pakistan to act by maximizing its strategic choices and explore new partners in the IOR.

The history of the world is a witness that the Autobahn projects<sup>49</sup> under German Chancellor Adolf Hitler and the New Deal<sup>50</sup> under the U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt generated millions of jobs and strengthened German and American economies, respectively. Also, these mega projects raised the living conditions. It is worth mentioning that Hitler and Roosevelt rose to power in the same year i.e. 1933 and built their respective nation-states. The German Autobahn and American New Deal effectively helped both economies in recovering from the Great Depression. In modern times, India's SAGAR and Sagarmala strategy can be interpreted as such endeavours which are geared to yield manifold strategic results; maritime dominance and economic well-being remain chief objectives. Factually, strategic partners reap the burden of history, almost equally. For instance, the Allied Powers collectively defeated Nazi Germany during the Second World War;

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<sup>49</sup> Roderick Stackelberg, *The Routledge Companion to Nazi Germany*, Routledge Companions to History (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 127–31.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel P. Murphy and Stephen Armstrong, *5 Steps to a 5: AP U.S. History 2018* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2017), 248–59.

nonetheless, soon after, Soviet Union being an ally, turned into the default enemy. Likewise, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Pact contested strategically during the Cold War; nevertheless, the U.S. manoeuvred remarkably during the Suez Crisis of 1956 and steered itself towards the helm of affairs.<sup>51</sup> However, since, great powers think strategically and have strategic goals, quite often remarkably act and manoeuvre tactically in a tacit manner. Undoubtedly, this is what makes them great.

## Conclusions

In hindsight, Chinese and American regional hegemonies are clear as a day. However, China would prefer to strengthen another great power in relation to India in the region i.e. Pakistan, and the U.S. would like to see India as a contender to Chinese power. As, Mearsheimer argued that "Regional hegemons prefer that there be at least two great powers located together" and "their proximity will force them to concentrate their attention on each other."<sup>52</sup> In such a way, China could reap the fruits of already bitter relationship between Pakistan and India, and the U.S. could benefit from the Sino-Indian shared hostile history. Perhaps, the U.S. Navy's Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan was right when it argued in the Nineteenth-century that the Indian Ocean is the ocean of destiny.<sup>53</sup> Later, a scholar argued the security competition between India and China as "The Greater Game" and related India to its "destiny" and "China."<sup>54</sup> The Chinese, American, and Indian ambitions in the Indian Ocean are indicators of a growing security competition which has the potential of becoming intense. However, India's Sagarmala Strategy can be argued as New Delhi's set of endeavours to make Indian Ocean as "India's Ocean." Nevertheless, the Indian Ocean seems to be the perfect battleground for great powers, peer-competitors, and aspiring great powers. As, the ocean hosts three important straits including

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<sup>51</sup> Spencer C. Tucker and Priscilla Mary Roberts, eds., *Cold War: A Student Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 613-16.

<sup>52</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 42.

<sup>53</sup> Toshi Yoshihara, "Chinese Views of India in the Indian Ocean: A Geopolitical Perspective," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 3 (June 2012): 490-91.

<sup>54</sup> David Van Praagh, *The Greater Game. India's Race with Destiny and China* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 288-324.



Malacca, Hormuz, and Bab-el-Mandeb, and the transportation of approximately half of the world's total oil production.<sup>55</sup>

It is observed that in this great power struggle, Russia's absence is deeply felt. Russia can establish its foothold in the Indian Ocean by using Pakistani ports. Also, Russia could station its naval forces at Iranian docks; however, in that case, Iran will have to discern between India and Russia, as, it is likely to be very hard to accommodate both at the same time. Nevertheless, President Putin's attention seems to be in the Western Europe, Arctic Circle, and the Middle East. With Brexit and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's determination to lead the drive to bring Britain back to the heights of glory; it is worth contemplating the future of British overseas territory Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Future research could readily probe the potential of British presence in the IOR.

In sum, the IOR is becoming highly contentious between the great powers i.e. the U.S. and China. However, the regional and major powers including Pakistan, India, and Iran are also competing alongside. In the past, it remained calm and peaceful largely; however, calm before the storm, is an established vernacular in maritime affairs. A great game is underway that was referred to as "The Greater Game."<sup>56</sup> It is likely to be played among great powers with higher uncertainties and severe repercussions. If it continues to happen, it would be a hotbed and possibly the home to many conflicts. The U.S. presence and its significant support to India clearly shows that it wants to maintain its influence in the region. The current Indian developments in the IOR rings an alarm bell for both China and Pakistan, as New Delhi has clearly displayed its regional hegemonic ambitions and aspirations in becoming a functional great power with economic wherewithal and military capabilities. In this regard, Pakistan is a neighbouring country to both India and China and the central littoral state of the Indian Ocean and will be directly affected by Sino-Indian rivalry or U.S.-China rivalry. Pakistan needs to act rapidly on the existing and

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<sup>55</sup> Arnab Dasgupta, "India's Strategy in the Indian Ocean Region: A Critical Aspect of India's Energy Security," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2018): 46.

<sup>56</sup> Praagh, *The Greater Game. India's Race with Destiny and China*.

forthcoming potential of this ocean. Instead of aligning only with China, Pakistan has to maintain a balanced relationship with India, China, and the U.S. Islamabad should also improve its relations with neighbouring and Gulf countries to address their concerns and have to improve confidence building measures so that it could also have strong allies in the region.

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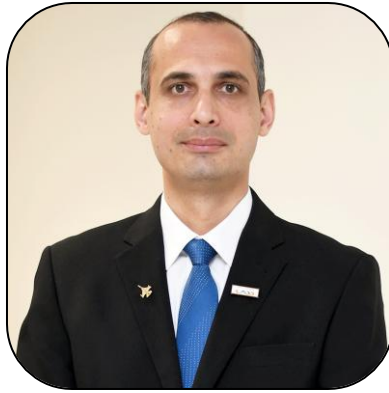
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